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West of Center: Jews on the Real and Imagined Frontiers of Texas

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West of Center: Jews on the Real and Imagined Frontiers of Texas

by

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West of Center: Jews on the Real and Imagined Frontiers of Texas

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This dissertation is a narrative history of Texas Jewry focusing on ways that the idea of the frontier has shaped Jewish life and religious practice in Texas. It covers the experience of Texas Jews from the late sixteenth century – when "secret Jews" fleeing the Spanish Inquisition may have settled in South Texas – to the present. It includes topics such as the appearance of the first Jews in the state; the beginnings of Jewish communities and religious institutions; the Galveston Immigration Movement; the creation of the state's first Jewish newspaper; the rise of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s; the ideological clashes over Zionism and religious orthodoxy that culminated in the Houston Controversy of 1942; the impact on Texas Jews of the Holocaust, World War II, and the establishment of Israel; the conflicted feelings of Jewish Texans toward the Civil Rights Movement; and the nature of the community today.

As a diasporic people living in what one Jewish historian described as "one of the last corners of the Dispersion," Texas Jews built religious communities far from the acknowledged centers of Jewish culture and history, doing so with an awareness of themselves as a peripheral community. Early chapters of this study explore the effect of the "material" frontier – the realities of space, distance and remoteness – on nineteenth-century Texas Jewish communities. Even when the material frontier disappeared, however, Texas Jews continued to imagine themselves as a peripheral people. The geographic distance that separated them from Jewish centers, formerly a critical factor in defining their communities and religious lives, became an imagined distance, an "interior" frontier composed of symbolic distinctions between Texas Jews and other groups. Later chapters examine this phenomenon and trace through the social and political developments of the twentieth century how Texas Jews continue to define themselves as a distinct people in contrast both to other Texans and other Jews.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Prologue: A True Story

On a warm, still afternoon in 1884, the citizens of Corsicana, Texas, gathered in the center of town for Trades Day. Merchants and traders from throughout Navarro and nearby counties set up displays of their goods all along Beaton Street. The crowd came out to take advantage of a few bargains and to enjoy the food – baked, fried and barbecued – offered from stalls and shop windows. Normally a relatively quiet stop along the Houston and Texas Central Railroad, Corsicana came alive that day to celebrate its own commercial success and, just as important, to break for a brief time the monotony of life in a dusty East Texas town of only a few thousand people.

Beaton Street was bustling with visitors – itinerant peddlers, shopkeepers from nearby towns, wholesalers in to drum up business with local stores, farmers and their families come to see the newest implements and to stock up on supplies. In that crowd, the stranger could have blended in easily. Even his most distinguishing feature, a wooden peg-leg where his right calf and foot had once been, might have gone unnoticed among people so accustomed to the sight of Confederate war veterans.

But the stranger's intention was not to go unnoticed. Later tellers of the story disagree on whether he was working for someone in town – someone anxious to make a lasting advertising impression – or if he had dreamed up the stunt on his own. Some have suggested that he was a former circus performer plying the only trade he knew to earn whatever nickels and dimes he could from

an amazed and appreciative crowd. Others believe that he was just a drunk out on a semiconscious binge. There is little disagreement, though, on the particulars of what he did.

As the people sifted among the stalls, a heavy rope, one end securely tied to a rooftop, flew overhead to another rooftop across the intersection with Collin Street. They watched as the stranger came down among them from the first building, limped across the street, vanished into the second building and reappeared on the roof to pull the line taut and tie it off. As they looked curiously up at him, he stepped back from the edge of the roof and out of their sight. After a few dramatic moments he reappeared, brandishing a pole several feet long and ("Is that what I think it is?") a cast-iron cookstove attached firmly to his back with leather straps. Struggling only a little under the weight of the stove, the powerful stranger stepped to the edge of the roof, the balancing pole stretched out away from him on either side. He had tied his trouser legs over his knees, clearly revealing his wooden leg, which he slid carefully out onto the line; people in the crowd could now see that it was notched at the bottom to fit snugly over the rope.

Pushing the peg-leg out before him, he followed with his good foot, stood a moment to secure his balance on the rope, waggled the pole a bit (for dramatic effect, surely), then slid the peg forward another step. The crowd fell to a tense hush and quickly cleared a wide swath below him as if rushing from a fire – far enough for safety but still close enough to watch. They stared upward as he worked his way along, his face marked with intense concentration, his back straining forward against the weight of the stove. Two stories wasn't too far to

hear his strong and deliberate breathing, which settled into a mechanical pattern with the shifting of his weight and the inching of his body – slide the peg, step the foot – over the middle of the street.

Where the rope reached its lowest point, where it began its slight uphill incline toward home, is where he had his first trouble. He bobbled a bit to one side, the crowd gasped below, but he righted himself easily. Another step, another terrifying sideslip. He dipped the pole opposite to try to recover his balance, but the stove on his back gave him an unnatural inertia, and he overcompensated, pulling his weight against the fall just a little too hard. Leaning more heavily now, starting to go, he desperately flung his shoulders again to the opposite side, the pole now flailing uselessly in his hands, his legs quivering under him and giving the rope first a barely controlled, then a violent oscillation. He rode it there for a frozen moment, then as the crowd watched in horror he tumbled from the line and landed, under the stove, in a heap on the street, a cloud of dust rising around him.

The frenzied townspeople gathered over him, and someone checked to see if he was breathing. He was, barely. They carefully unstrapped the stove from his body, and the strongest among them pushed it aside. Someone hoisted him over a shoulder and carried him to a nearby hotel, where they laid him in a bed and called for the town physician. Dr. J.T. Gulick arrived quickly and found the stranger hovering on the edge of consciousness. Doc Gulick asked the stranger his name but got no response. A very brief examination proved that death was imminent. Unsure if the stranger could even understand, the doctor gently told

him the bad news and asked if he wanted a preacher. The cloudy eyes momentarily cleared, and in a dry voice the stranger said Yes, please, he was a Methodist. The doctor sent someone to fetch Abe Mulkey, the nearest Methodist preacher, who in later years became a famous evangelist.

Mulkey arrived at the hotel, took a seat at the stranger's bedside, and asked the man his name. Getting no response, the preacher began to pray quietly. Before he could get far, though, the stranger awoke, caught the preacher's gaze, and whispered that, forgive him, he was not, in fact, a Methodist. He was a Jew, and could he please talk to a rabbi? Like many small Texas towns, Corsicana had a sizable Jewish population, as many as 300 by some counts, but they had no synagogue and no rabbi. Mulkey sent instead for a prominent Jewish merchant, a leader of the community. When the merchant arrived, he took up Mulkey's chair at the bedside. The stranger was now very near death. The two had only a moment to pray together – long enough for the dying man's flawless Hebrew to convince the merchant that he was undoubtedly Jewish – before the stranger passed silently away, his name still unknown.

Though without a synagogue, the Jews of Corsicana had loosely organized themselves into an informal congregation, and they had established some means for looking out for their common welfare. They had set aside a piece of ground for a Jewish cemetery, a low fence around it to separate it from the non-Jewish graves nearby, and they resolved that this was the only fitting place to lay the stranger to rest. They took up a collection, purchased a headstone, and had it engraved in straight, deep letters with the simple epitaph "Rope Walker,"

and the year, 1884. It is there to this day in the Jewish cemetery in Corsicana, an object of fascination and speculation for everyone who sees it.

Introduction

Kinky Friedman, the country singer-turned crime novelist, once described himself as "the bastard child of twin cultures." "Both cowboys and Jewboys," he explained, "wear their hats in the house."[1] This is a typical Friedman throwaway line: clever, a bit crass, played strictly for laughs. But like many of the jokes that pepper his songs and novels, it hints at something deeper. By calling himself a "bastard child," Friedman implies that his two heritages, Texan and Jewish, are incompatible in some way, that their marriage cannot produce a legitimate child. But at the same time he calls them "twin" cultures, indicating that they do in fact have something in common, that however incompatible they appear they are still closely related. The joke unites the two groups, each with its distinctive headgear, while reminding his listener that Stetsons and yarmulkes are really not the same thing at all. The paradox that Friedman's joke reveals lies at the heart of any understanding of Jewish life in Texas: Jews are both part of Texas history and not part of it, at home in the state but distinct from most of its people. They have managed to walk a fine line, accommodating to the demands of secular life in Texas without sacrificing their separate religious and ethnic heritage. And they have found ways to contribute enormously to the state's economic, political, educational, and artistic institutions while remaining loyal to a faith whose center of spiritual and institutional energy was always someplace else.

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1 Andrea Chambers, "It's elementary: shooting from the lip, cocky Kinky Friedman has a talent for music and mysteries," *People Weekly* 28 (9 November 1987): 117.

This dissertation examines the juncture of these two cultural traditions, Texan and Jewish. On one level, it traces the history of Jewish community development and religious life in Texas from the earliest Jewish settlers to the present, when Texas Jews constitute a religious community of some 128,000 people. Along the way, it explores key developments such as the appearance of the first Jews in the state; the founding of Jewish communities and religious institutions; the Galveston Immigration Movement of 1908-1914; the creation of the state's first Jewish newspaper; the Texas Jewish response to the rise of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s; the ideological clashes over Zionism and religious orthodoxy in the 1930s; the impact on Texas Jews of the Holocaust, World War II, and the establishment of Israel; Jewish Texans' conflicted involvement in the Civil Rights Movement; and the nature of the Texas Jewish community today.[2]

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[2] Several articles and book-length studies of Texas Jewry already exist, but none attempts to capture the totality of the Jewish experience in Texas in a narrative, as opposed to a pictorial, format. Rabbi Henry Cohen's essays on early Texas Jews in the *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* constitute pioneering work in the field, and Cohen, who spoke personally with descendants of many of the state's early Jewish settlers, provides invaluable material that is unavailable elsewhere. In 1936, in recognition of the Texas Centennial, Cohen co-edited a collection of historical essays about Texas Jewry by rabbis in the state. No one produced another comprehensive work on the subject until 1974, when Phil Hewitt of the Institute of Texas Cultures compiled a series of essays on early Jews as *The Jewish Texans*. Natalie Ornish published *Pioneer Jewish Texans* in 1989, a pictorial survey that emphasized the earlier generations and covered a few pivotal individuals and events in great detail, and the next year, Ruthe Winegarten and Cathy Schechter published *Deep in the Heart: the Lives and Legends of Texas Jews*, also a pictorial history with a somewhat broader scope than Ornish's effort. Rabbi Jimmy Kessler, who founded the Texas Jewish Historical Society in 1980, wrote an entry about Texas Jewry for the *Handbook of Texas* which provides a succinct but thorough account. Hollace Ava Weiner has produced the most complete study of the subject to date in *Jewish Stars in Texas: Rabbis and Their Work*, which focuses on the lives and activities of a broad selection of the state's Jewish religious leaders. Most recently, Brian Cohen directed a video documentary about Jews in rural Texas communities which, while emphasizing contemporary accounts, includes much significant historical material. Henry Cohen, "Settlement of the Jews in Texas," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 2 (1894): 139-156; Henry Cohen, "The Jews in Texas," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 4 (1896): 9-19; Henry Cohen, "Henry Castro, Pioneer and Colonist," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 5 (1897):

39-43; Henry Cohen, David Lefkowitz and Ephraim Frisch, *One Hundred Years of Jewry in Texas* (Dallas: Jewish Advisory Committee for the Texas Centennial Religious Program, 1936); Phil Hewitt, *The Jewish Texans* (San Antonio: Institute of Texas Cultures, 1974); Natalie Ornish, *Pioneer Jewish Texans* (Dallas: Texas Heritage Press, 1989); Ruthe Winegarten and Cathy Schechter, *Deep in the Heart: The Lives and Legends of Texas Jews, a Photographic History* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1990); James L. Kessler, "Jews," in *The Handbook of Texas Online* <http://tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/\online/articles/view/JJ/ pxj1.html> [Accessed 20 June 2001]; Hollace Ava Weiner, *Jewish Stars in Texas: Rabbis and Their Work* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1999); Brian Cohen, *At Home on the Range: Jewish Life in Texas (Beyond the Big Cities)* (New York: Carousel Film and Video, 1999). Published book-length memoirs of Texas Jews include Nicholas Adolphus Sterne, *Hurrah for Texas! The Diary of Adolphus Sterne, 1838-1851*, ed. Archie P. McDonald (Austin: Eakin Press, 1986); Alexander Ziskind Gurwitz, *Memories of Two Generations*, tr. Rabbi Amram Prero (San Antonio, c. 1932); Harry Landa, *As I Remember* (San Antonio: Carleton, 1945); I.H. Kempner, *Recalled Recollections* (Dallas: Egan Press, 1961); Stanley Marcus, *Minding the Store: A Memoir* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1974); Max Apple, *Roommates* (New York: Warner Books, 1994); Stanley E. Ely, *In Jewish Texas: a Family Memoir* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1998); and Mike Jacobs, *Holocaust Survivor: Mike Jacobs' Triumph Over Tragedy, a Memoir*, ed. Ginger Jacobs (Austin: Eakin Press, 2001). Biographies include Anne Nathan and Harry I. Cohen, *The Man Who Stayed in Texas: The Life of Rabbi Henry Cohen* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1941); A. Stanley Dreyfus, *Henry Cohen: Messenger of the Lord* (Bloch Publishing, 1963); Floyd S. Fierman, *The Schwartz Family of El Paso: The Story of a Pioneer Jewish Family in the Southwest* (El Paso: University of Texas at El Paso Texas Western Press, 1980); Shmuel Geller, *Mazkeres Ahavah: Remembrance of Love, A Biographical Account of Rabbi Yaakov and Sara Geller and Family* (Zichron Yaakov, Israel: Institution for Publication of Books and Study of Manuscripts, 1988); Harold M. Hyman, *Oleander Odyssey: The Kempners of Galveston, Texas, 1854-1980s* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1990); Juliet George Dees, "By the Brazos and the Trinity They Hung Up Their Harps: Two Jewish Immigrants in Texas [Jacob de Cordova and Jacob Samuels]" (Master's Thesis, Texas Christian University, 1991); and Jimmy Kessler, *Henry Cohen: The Life of a Frontier Rabbi* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1997). Monographs on specific topics, congregations or communities include William Sajowitz, "History of Reform Judaism in San Antonio, Texas, 1874-1945" (Master's Thesis, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1945); Ginger Chesnick Jacobs, "A Comparison of the Dallas Jewish Population of 1953-1954 with that of 1939-1940" (Master's Thesis, Southern Methodist University, 1953); Bertha Glick Newman, et. al., *A Picture of Jewish Life in Dallas from 1872 to 1955* (Dallas: National Council of Jewish Women, 1955); Marilynn Wood Hill, "A History of the Jewish Involvement in the Dallas Community" (Master's Thesis, Southern Methodist University, 1967); Helena Frenkil Schlam, "The Early Jews of Houston" (Master's Thesis, Ohio State University, 1971); Elaine Maas, "The Jews of Houston: An Ethnographic Study" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Rice University, 1973); Frances R. Kallison, "100 Years of Jewry in San Antonio" (Master's Thesis, Trinity University [San Antonio], 1977); Carlos Montalvo Larralde, "Chicano Jews in South Texas" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California at Los Angeles, 1978); Bernard Marinbach, *Galveston: Ellis Island of the West* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983); Bobby D. Weaver, *Castro's Colony: Empresario Development in Texas, 1842-1865* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1985); Stuart Rockoff, "Identity and Assimilation: the Jewish Community of Houston, 1900-1925" (Master's Report, University of Texas at Austin, 1995); Gerry Cristol, *A Light in the Prairie* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1998); and Rose G. Biderman, *They Came to Stay: The Story of the Jews of Dallas* (Austin: Eakin Press, 2002).

At the same time, this study explores the intersection in Texas of two distinct and sometimes competing ideas that established the symbolic context of Jewish life in the state: the American frontier and the Jewish Diaspora. Texas is both a quintessential frontier and, in the words of Jewish historian Cyrus Adler, "one of the last corners of the Dispersion," and Texas Jews are part of both the movement of Euro-Americans into the American West and the dispersion of Jews across the globe.[3] As frontierspeople entering a forbidding environment seeking personal economic opportunity, they often made poor Jews, removing themselves from population centers where the requirements of their faith would have been easier to maintain. As Jews, they often made poor frontierspeople, as they continued to look back to Jewish religious tradition and to Zion for the sources of their identity, rather than permitting the melting pot of the American frontier to absorb them. As frontierspeople, they saw their venture into the West as part of a necessary and admirable project to build a lasting community where none had existed before, but as Diaspora Jews they were also building a life in exile, far from the sources of Jewish meaning and identity and outside the consciousness of most Jews.

Of these two ideas, frontier and Diaspora, the frontier is a more useful structure for understanding Jewish life in Texas, and it will predominate in this study. As will be explained below, the idea of the frontier permits a consideration of Jewish Texans which does not diminish the importance of their story by unfavorably comparing them to a perceived geographical, historical, or spiritual

[3] Cyrus Adler to Abraham Schechter, in Abraham Schechter, *The Kallah: An Annual Convention of Texas Rabbis* (March 1927 to March 1928): 17.

"center" of Jewish experience. Texas is home to a large, diverse, and self-aware Jewish community that deserves consideration on its own terms without resorting to polemics about acculturation and assimilation, about who is a "real" Jew or what is an "authentic" Jewish community. In addition, as will also be elaborated below, the diasporic relationship between Texas Jews and those at the national and international centers of Jewish population may itself be conceived as a kind of frontier, an imaginary boundary that Texas Jews have drawn to distinguish themselves from other Jewish experiences. The tension between the impulse of Jewish Texans to make such distinctions and the competing urge to dissolve them is a crucial element of their history that the frontier idea will help to clarify.

The idea of the frontier has both literal and figurative significance: frontiers are political or cultural boundaries, lines that separate one entity from another, and as such they exist in both a physical and a conceptual sense. A frontier may be a geographic place or material condition, or it may be a set of imaginary boundaries marking differences of culture, personality, and attitude among groups of people. Nineteenth-century Texas Jews encountered the frontier in its most literal, material sense – as a physical region of sparse population at the edge of Euro-American settlement that offered few of the inducements of "civilized" life. They lived far from established centers of Jewish population under conditions that made the practice of their faith and the preservation of their particular ethno-religious identity exceedingly complicated. In such a frontier, they formed a small and marginal religious community, set apart from the mainstream of American Jewry and from the Jewish events around the world that

constituted the "real" history of the Jewish people. To offset their marginality, Jews on the Texas frontier sought to build communal and institutional facilities comparable to those they had left behind in Europe or in larger American cities. They told the story of their settlement in Texas in almost prophetic terms, arguing that their sojourn into the American West made them, in fact, more like their biblical ancestors than were their urban contemporaries. "Like the tent of our Patriarch Abraham in the desert," wrote a biographer of Rabbi Ya'akov Geller of Houston, "the Geller home radiated the warmth and splendor of Torah life."[4] In her history of the Jewish community of El Paso, Fanny Sattinger Goodman made much of the same analogy: "In this Desert Environment, similar to the one in which their forefathers travelled on the way towards the Promised Land," she wrote, "there came to the pioneers of the eighteen hundreds 'A Behest from the Prophet, to prepare the way in the wilderness, and to build a Tabernacle,' as it was written in the Old Testament."[5] The hardships and opportunities of the material frontier – the difficulty of maintaining a meaningful sense of Jewish identity where no Jewish community existed and the process of creating such a community from nothing – are examined in the first two chapters of this study.

The material frontier was short-lived, however, and by the early twentieth century most Texas Jews lived in the state's largest cities, where Jewish facilities were readily available if not plentiful, and where the preservation of Jewish rituals was as convenient as it was almost anywhere else in the country. Participation in

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[4] Geller, 33.

[5] Fanny Sattinger Goodman, "'In the Beginning': The Jewish Community of El Paso, Texas" (1970): 1, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati Campus, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion [hereafter cited as AJA] Histories File. Capitalization as in the original.

nationwide organizations like B'nai B'rith, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, and the National Council of Jewish Women, as well as nationally important programs centered in Texas like the Galveston Immigration Movement, drew Texas Jews into closer relationships with Jews in other parts of the country and effectively ended the isolation that had characterized the early years of their community. Nevertheless, the frontier idea remained crucial to Jewish identity in Texas. As the material frontier ceased to be a factor in their lives, Texas Jews internalized and transformed it into a set of symbolic boundaries that continued to define them and to distinguish them from both non-Jewish Texans and non-Texan Jews.[6] Thus the frontier idea remained, and remains to this day, a hallmark of the Jewish experience in Texas.

As a tiny ethnic and religious minority, never more than 0.8% of the state's total population, Texas Jews continually managed such cultural boundaries, drawing and maintaining imaginary frontiers both to define their place within and to distinguish themselves from the rest of the diverse Texas

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[6] What I am describing as an internalized frontier resembles the phenomenon that Fredrik Barth identifies in his study of ethnic groups in pluralistic communities. Barth takes issue with the conventional view that interethnic contact ultimately results in acculturation, in the loss of integrity of one or all of the interacting groups. "[E]thnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of social interaction and acceptance," he writes, "but are quite to the contrary often the very foundations on which embracing social systems are built. Interaction in such a social system does not lead to [a group's] liquidation through change and acculturation," but "cultural differences can persist despite inter-ethnic contact and interdependence." In Barth's interpretation, intergroup relations force groups to define more concretely the cultural boundaries that distinguish them from others, thus strengthening, not diminishing, their group cohesion. "The critical focus of investigation from this point of view," he writes, "becomes the ethnic *boundary* that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses." Groups define themselves, that is, in contrast to others (across imagined frontiers) rather than by a positive determination of their own qualities. Fredrik Barth, ed., *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1969): 10, 15.

population. As Texans with white skins, Jews found their place predominantly within the state's Anglo majority. Indeed, there was no real alternative in a state whose rich ethnic diversity had traditionally been simplified into broad racial categories: Anglo, Black, Mexican. The term Anglo, as Texas historian T.R. Fehrenbach explains, essentially referred to people who fit into neither of the other groups. "By this definition," he writes without apparent irony, "ethnic groups as diverse as Irish Catholics, Jews, Lebanese, Norwegian, Chinese, Greek, German, Czech, and Polish Americans in Texas are all Anglos and consider themselves such."[7] This use of the term thus designated not only what an individual was, but even more emphatically what he or she was not, and such a scheme left no room for subtleties: Jews and other white ethnics could either be subsumed as Anglos and share in the state's power structure, or they could be cast out among the racially and historically vanquished.

In fact, Texas Jews were quite content to accept the state's Anglo history as their own, and they often displayed great pride in identifying themselves with triumphalistic, even racist, retellings of the state's past. Rabbi Henry Cohen of Galveston (a native Londoner and so an "Anglo" in even the strictest sense of the word) was the first researcher to begin documenting the history of Jews in Texas, and he went to special effort to identify and describe individuals who had participated in the state's early Anglo history. According to Cohen, for example, the Alsatian Henry Castro, who organized a colony in South Texas and founded the town of Castroville, had done nothing less than establish "a permanent home

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[7] T.R. Fehrenbach, *Seven Keys to Texas* (El Paso: University of Texas at El Paso Press, 1986 [1983]): 2.

for civilized men between San Antonio and the Rio Grande," something "which both Spanish and Mexican power had failed to do." Cohen described at length the various threats to the survival of the colony, most notably "the attacks of bandits and degenerate Mexicans," as well as gun-toting Indians he called "savages." In honor of this "heroic" act, Cohen said that Castro deserved "to be enrolled among the most prominent pioneers of civilization in modern times."[8] In what is a good example of an imagined frontier, Cohen included Castro in the canon of heroic Anglo Texans while distinguishing him from the supposedly less advanced Spanish, Mexican, and Native American cultures; for Cohen, Jews were part of the conquering Anglo majority, not a subordinated minority.

This racial identification, however, did not eliminate the wish of Texas Jews to distinguish themselves from other whites, and their efforts to preserve their separate ethnic and religious identity shaped much of their twentieth-century experience. In establishing the state's first Jewish newspaper, for example, Edgar Goldberg identified his readers with the state's Anglo mainstream but also appealed to their distinctiveness; when the Ku Klux Klan rose to power in the 1920s, Texas Jews were forced to reconsider the degree to which Anglo society had accepted them; and in the 1950s and 1960s, as African Americans protested for civil rights, Jews who had worked their way into the white power structures of Texas cities empathized with their situation while joining other whites on the privileged side of segregation. The establishment and negotiation of internal

[8] Henry Cohen, "Henry Castro," 41.

frontiers between Jews and other Texans characterizes Jewish life in Texas to the present day and will be covered extensively in the chapters that follow.

As Texas Jews negotiated their differences from other Texans, moreover, they also defined themselves in contrast to other Jews. Texas Jews were keenly aware that they lived in a peripheral Jewish community, but rather than worrying over the consequences of such a condition, many of them reveled in the possibilities that an acculturated Texan Judaism presented. Nineteenth-century Texas correspondents to national Jewish newspapers signed themselves with pseudonyms like "Lone Star" and "Alamo," and they reported on their community activities "[a]way out here, on the rolling prairies of Texas," as one wrote from Fort Worth.[9] More recently, individual Texas Jews have emphasized the presence of their families, or even of themselves, at the state's origin, even if they had to stretch the truth a bit to do it. Bertha Bender, a longtime resident of Breckenridge and the wife of a Jewish cattle rancher, reminisced after her 101st birthday that "Texas had become a state in 1885, just three years before my birth, and it seemed we were destined to grow together."[10] This is a fine sentiment, except that Texas actually became a state in 1846 and again, following the Civil War, in 1870, long before Mrs. Bender's birth. In addition, she was not born in Texas but in Lithuania; she and her husband, whom she met at a Zionist meeting in Virginia, did not arrive in Texas until 1911, when Mrs. Bender was 26 years old. This sense of belonging in Texas took an extreme form in the belief, stated by many

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[9] See, for example, "Lone Star" to the Editor of the *Jewish South* (10 October 1879); "Louis" to Editor of *Jewish South* (16 May 1879).

[10] Betty Ewing, "A delight at 101: Bertha Bender's life was destined to grow with the state she adopted," *Houston Chronicle* (6 September 1989).

Texas Jews, that Texas itself could become a Jewish population center, even a Promised Land, and many Texas Jews expressed opposition to Zionism, the effort to re-establish a sovereign Jewish state in Palestine, on the grounds that Texas would make a more suitable home for the Jewish people.

As a diasporic people, Texas Jews were perfectly aware of the geographical and conceptual distances that lay between themselves and Jews at the supposed centers. "[I] want to tell you," wrote a nineteenth-century immigrant in El Paso to his family back in Germany, "that this place is nearly the end of the world and the last of creation."[11] As the twentieth century progressed, however, Jews from Eastern Europe and from New York arrived in Texas, bringing a more traditional religious style and a stronger devotion to Zionism, and their presence changed the ways that Texas Jewry related to the geographic and conceptual centers. Still, many Jewish Texans continued to view other Jews across an imaginary frontier of social and cultural difference and to consider themselves a distinctive Jewish community. Thus, to examine Texas Jewry only in the context of the Diaspora, as a story of isolated people far from the centers of their faith and culture, does not do justice to what they have achieved in Texas.

Indeed, recent scholarship suggests that the Diaspora, with its implication that the Jewish universe has a "center," is no longer valid as a means of interpreting Jewish life in remote or isolated areas around the world. In *Jewries at the Frontier*, Sander Gilman and Martin Shain present a collection of essays that explore Jewish communal and spiritual life in a number of "frontier"

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[11] Ernst Kohlberg, *Letters Of Ernst Kohlberg, 1875-1877*, tr. Walter K. Kohlberg (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1973): 14.

communities including China, South Africa, Alaska and, in an essay by Seth L. Wolitz, Texas. In his introduction to the volume, Gilman suggests that Jewish historians dispense with the idea of the Diaspora as "the overarching model for Jewish history":

> This model [has] been reinforced by the role that Israel and Zionist historians have had in reshaping the narrative of Jewish history. It was (and remains) the model of "you" and "us." It is the imagined center which defines me[, a Diaspora Jew,] as being on the periphery. "Israel," the lost Garden of Eden, the City on the Hill, is its center; all the rest of Jewish experience is on the periphery.[12]

In a Diaspora-based "center/periphery model," American Jewry is peripheral to the Israeli center. But America nevertheless produced its own Jewish center, New York City and its famously Jewish Lower East Side, and thus other American Jewish communities, like Texas, are peripheries of a periphery, standing in relation to world Jewry as, perhaps, Ireland stands in relation to Europe – an island off the coast of an island off the coast.[13]

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[12] Sander L. Gilman, "Introduction: The Frontier as a Model for Jewish History," in *Jewries at the Frontier: Accommodation, Identity, Conflict*, ed. Sander L. Gilman and Milton Shain (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999): 1.

[13] The ideas used here to describe Texas Jewry may apply equally well to other American Jewish communities. Published studies of other "marginal" communities, in fact, especially in the South and West, have emphasized their perceived distance from the centers, as revealed in their titles: see, for example, Eli N. Evans, *The Provincials* (New York: Atheneum, 1980); Sophie Trupin, *Dakota Diaspora: Memoirs of a Jewish Homesteader* (Berkeley: Alternative Press, 1984); Carolyn Gray LeMaster, *A Corner of the Tapestry: A History of the Jewish Experience in Arkansas, 1820s-1990s* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1994); Linda Mack Schloff, *And Prairie Dogs Weren't Kosher: Jewish Women in the Upper Midwest Since 1855* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1996); and Penny Diane Wolin, *The Jews of Wyoming: Fringe of the Diaspora* (Cheyenne: Crazy Woman Creek Publishing, 2000). "You feel a separateness from the community," says one of Wolin's Wyoming interviewees. "If you read Genesis, about Abraham and Isaac and all those stories, you get a sense of people who are just out there alone in the desert with nobody else. And that's what it's really like out here." "Out here in Laramie," says another, "we're as far removed as possible from a coherent, cohesive Jewish community. You make it yourself here. You can't rely on institutions that already exist." Wolin, 152, 156.

A consequent assumption has prevailed in the historiography of American Judaism: "American Jews" are New Yorkers. In calling his magisterial history of the Lower East Side *World of Our Fathers*, for example, Irving Howe elided the experiences of thousands of American Jews whose fathers (and mothers, for that matter) were not from Howe's old neighborhood.[14] Similarly, in her study of the migration of Northern Jews to Miami and Los Angeles after World War II, Deborah Dash Moore blithely ignores the existence of all non-Northern American Jews. "Nineteen forty-five marks a turning point for American Jews," she says, without clarifying which ones she means. "That year they crossed a threshold to embrace the fulfillment promised by America. Behind them lay the immigrant working-class world – their parents' world of passionate politics and a vibrant Yiddish culture, their childhood world indelibly associated with New York City and the other large cities of the Northeast and Midwest." But this description only pertains to a portion of America's Jews and not, as Moore implies, to all of them. She goes on to say that "[i]n the postwar era Jews discovered Houston and Dallas, Atlanta and Phoenix, and especially Miami and Los Angeles."[15] The suggestion that these communities were unknown until New York Jews "discovered" them, crossing the Hudson like Columbus over the Atlantic, is simply false: they all had thriving Jewish communities long before World War II. Moore's point seems to be that until New York Jews did something, it never

[14] Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (New York: Schocken Books, 1989 [1976]).
[15] Deborah Dash Moore, *To the Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and L.A.* (New York: Free Press, 1994): 1-2.

happened: as the presumed center of American Jewry, New York stands as the *only* American Jewish experience, and all others simply vanish.

More troubling still, the question of spiritual authenticity lies always just below the surface of interpretations of "peripheral" Jewish communities, as the "center" is not only a geographic location (Israel, New York), but a spiritual core of traditional Jewish practice and profound awareness of Jewish ethnic or national identity. Conceived religiously, this core is Orthodox ritual and belief; conceived linguistically it is Yiddish and Hebrew; conceived culturally, it is the *Yiddishkeit* of Eastern Europe; conceived socially, it is political Zionism and a wish for the ultimate ingathering of the Jewish people. If these characteristics mark the center, the only authentic Jewish "Us," then most of the world's Jews – those in the Americas (except, perhaps, in New York), those who are Reform, those who acculturate or intermarry, those who don't know a *schlemiel* from a *schlemazel* – are "Them," consigned to the margins and alien to their own cultural and religious heritage.

The question of authenticity is a recurring theme in depictions of Texas Jewry that originate outside the state. In 1997, for example, a Wisconsin-based on-line satire magazine called the *Onion* reported a curious (and wholly imaginary) event in Lubbock. Under the headline "Jewish Texans Commemorate Holocaust . . . Texas-Style!" the writer detailed Holocaust Hoedown '97, a month-long program sponsored by the West Texas chapter of B'nai B'rith "commemorating the 20th century's darkest hour." Rabbi Leonard "Too Tall" Sussman of San Antonio opened the proceedings by laying a wreath at B'nai

B'rith headquarters and reminding his listeners that "[i]f we do not remember the past, we are doomed to repeat it. . . . Never again, y'hear?" Then, after closing with a "Yee-haw!" the rabbi lit the Eternal Flame, over which "a spit will be installed for Wednesday's kosher steer cookout." Additional highlights included "a Main Street parade featuring red, white and blue Texas blossoms spelling out 'Don't Mess With The Jews'; a special appearance by six-time Zionist calf-roping champion Barry Lowenstein; and daily double-bill showings of *Schindler's List* and John Wayne's *True Grit*." A photograph, captioned "Texas Jews rustle up some memorial grub," accompanies the article. The picture shows two men cooking steaks over a pit. One wears a thick gray beard, dark coat and black, broad-brimmed hat, the other a short black beard with sidecurls and a casual burnt-orange shirt, leather vest, and a somewhat Stetsonish fedora. Both wear cooking aprons, one bearing an image of the Texas flag (with a six-pointed star), the other the motto "Never Again, Pardner!" A group of Hasidim mosey around behind them against a background of clear blue sky and desert mountains.[16]

The humor of this piece lies in the apparent incongruity of Jews in Texas, in the assumption that "Texas" Jews must be conspicuously different from "normal" ones. The article draws on familiar iconography – barbecues, boisterousness and desert expanses, beards, Semitic names and broad dark hats – and mixes them together for comic effect. Beneath this shallow level of humor, though, is a much less innocuous commentary that gives the satire its edge. These characters are more than Jews out of place: they are acculturationists who fail to

[16] "Jewish Texans Commemorate Holocaust... Texas-Style!," *The Onion* <http://www.theonion.com/onion3105/texasjews.html> [Accessed 28 May 1997]. For the record, there are no mountains anywhere near Lubbock.

realize how far they have fallen, how far they have drifted from any genuine sense of Judaism. They are entirely unaware of their own vulgarity, of the cheapness with which they treat what should be a somber occasion: nothing could be in poorer taste, after all, than a *barbecue* as a way of memorializing the ovens of the Holocaust. The article's author implies that the celebrants have so readily accepted the trappings of Texas identity that they have made their Jewishness less authentic, a meaningless and ill-fitting costume.

If Texas Jews feel self-conscious about their "Texanness," they have rarely shown it, choosing instead to privilege the place they stand and refusing to yield moral and spiritual authority to Jews anywhere else. In fact, as Seth Wolitz writes in his contribution to *Jewries at the Frontier*, many Texas Jews are entirely at peace with their peripheral status:

> [E]ven though New York functioned and functions today as the center of Jewish-American life, the Texas Jew, while accepting his peripheral condition from the New Yorker's perspective, does not feel decentered. The Texas Jew sees New York as the alternative vision and considers the Texas-Jewish experience no less valid and perhaps more desirable.[17]

Wolitz, however, is critical of this development, arguing that the Jewish identity claimed by "third generation" Texans is thoroughly compromised: "Traditional Ashkenazic ethnicity," he writes, "is surely gone, or at least distinctly transmogrified into a new Texas-Jewish expression."[18] Today's Jewish Texans have "no consciousness that there is any significant difference between the

[17] Seth L. Wolitz, "Bifocality in Jewish Identity in the Texas-Jewish Experience," in Gilman and Shain, 187.
[18] Wolitz, 200.

present Jewish identity and that of the past."[19] They wrongly believe, moreover, that their acculturated, "Texanized" sense of Jewish identity is authentic:

> [The Texas Jew] feels and acts the co-equal of his Gentile Texan counterpart and he feels himself the continuation of a Jewish inheritance that he believes is noble, ethical and valuable. What he is unaware of in his admiration of his inheritance is that he places his normative American-Texan values of personal reliance, co-equality of men and women, and all the democratic values of the Western Enlightenment tradition into his Judaism, which he believes were always there and to which his ancestors gave equal accord and appreciation. This forms the moral code and worldview of the Texas Jew.[20]

Wolitz does not dispute that Texas Jews feel at home in Texas. They claim "originary rights," in fact, by pointing out the presence of Jews in the state's early history, and they produce historical and creative texts that "have reinscribed this Texas Jewishness back into the original Jewish culture of the first generation so that the ancestors are proto-Americans or proto-Texans."[21] But such a reinterpretation of the past, he suggests, is ultimately self-deluding, and "the delightful aporia called the 'Texas Jew'" is a fallen creature.[22]

Wolitz's critique proceeds from his assumption (shared, it seems, with the editors of the *Onion*) that there is, in fact, an essential Judaism, a spiritual center, and that Texas Jewry is peripheral to it and thus inferior. In contrast, Sander Gilman proposes using the idea of the frontier as a means of describing peripheral communities without calling their authenticity into question. Rather than presuming a rigorous standard of true Judaism, next to which all other forms are

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[19] Wolitz, 188.
[20] Wolitz, 202.
[21] Wolitz, 187-88.
[22] Wolitz, 188.

fallen, Gilman argues for a new rendering of Jewish history "marked by the dynamics of change, confrontation, and accommodation; a history which focuses on the present and in which all participants are given voice."[23] Gilman turns to the idea of the frontier, "a place not defined by a center and a periphery, but by a constant sense of confrontation at the margin," as the source of such a narrative.[24] If Jewish history is, in fact, a story of "confrontation at the margin," then Jews in peripheral places, where contact with non-Jews is commonplace and unavoidable, become, in a sense, central to the Jewish experience.[25] By deploying the language of the frontier, suggesting that Jewish history be retold "as the history of the Jews at the frontier, a history with no center," Gilman validates "marginal" Jewish experiences, like that which occurred in Texas, as genuinely, even profoundly Jewish.[26]

"Frontier" is a complicated term with a controversial history, and as Gilman traces its meaning through many of its possible interpretations, it will be helpful to do so here as well. Any understanding of the significance of the frontier in American history begins with Frederick Jackson Turner and his conveniently titled 1893 address, "The Significance of the Frontier in American

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[23] Gilman, 11.

[24] Gilman, 12.

[25] There is, of course, a tremendous amount of "confrontation at the margin" between Jews and non-Jews even in the supposed Jewish centers – as the Palestinian situation in Israel boldly attests. Gilman's argument is thus even stronger: the frontier, the confrontation with the Other, is characteristic of Jewish experience in every geographic location where Jews live, even at the presumed center, and thus distinctions between one place in the world and another are less significant than frontier interactions between Jews and non-Jews. Similarly, Henry Near makes an explicit comparison between the early Jewish settlers of Palestine and the American "pioneers." Henry Near, *Frontiersmen and Halutzim: The Image of Pioneer in North America And Pre-State Jewish Palestine* (Haifa: Institute for Study and Research of the Kibbutz and the Cooperative Idea, 1987).

[26] Gilman, 11.

History." Here Turner offered a vision of an American nation defined by its frontier, by the restless urge of its people to move ever westward. "The peculiarity of American institutions," Turner wrote, "is the fact that they have been compelled to adapt themselves to the changes of an expanding people."[27] That is, what made Americans American was the existence of a frontier and their urge to push into it. Turner understood that frontier to be a real place, an actual geographic location – in particular the line marking the western extreme of Euro-American settlement, the "margin of that settlement which has a density of two or more [people] to the square mile." But in less measurable terms, the frontier was also a place fraught with cultural significance, the point where Western Civilization met the wilderness and was consumed by it. As Americans advanced westward, Turner wrote, "the frontier [was] the outer edge of the wave – the meeting point between savagery and civilization."[28] Certainly Turner had put his finger on a very deep current in American thinking: pioneers in the nation's popular national mythology were more than simply settlers or colonists, but heroes whose efforts redeemed the wilderness from its legacy of savagery.

Many later Western historians, including Patricia Nelson Limerick and Richard White, rightfully criticized Turner's approach, going so far as to reject the frontier entirely as a useful means of understanding the history of the American West.[29] "When clearly and precisely defined," Limerick wrote, "the

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[27] Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, ed. Wilbur R. Jacobs (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992): 2.
[28] Turner, 3.
[29] See, most notably, Patricia Nelson Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: Norton, 1987) and Richard White, *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A New History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

term 'frontier' is nationalistic and often racist"; in essence, she said, it is "the area where white people get scarce." Rather than viewing westward expansion as a civilizing process, "New Western Historians," in Limerick's summarization, preferred to use terms like "invasion, conquest, colonization, [and] exploitation."[30] They recognized what Turner did not: westward expansion was hardly a simple process of a monolithic civilization meeting and subduing its monolithic opposite. It was, again in Limerick's words, rather a "convergence of diverse people – women as well as men, Indians, Europeans, Latin Americans, Asians, Afro-Americans – . . . and their encounters with each other and with the natural environment."[31]

While accepting the validity and necessity of this critique, Sander Gilman looks past it for a definition of "frontier" that permits its use to describe Jews in any marginal community: the American frontier, after all, which can certainly be described as a place of racism, conquest and exploitation, is only one of the many frontiers Jews have inhabited around the world. Gilman draws on the work of Stephen Aron, another historian of the American West, to show that the frontier can be "a useful category for the writing of the new Jewish history."[32] Aron argues that the frontier is still an essential idea for understanding what happened in the West:

> Rather than banishing the word for past offenses, western historians need to make the most of the frontier. Reconfigured as the lands where separate

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[30] Patricia Nelson Limerick, "What on Earth is the New Western History?" in Patricia Nelson Limerick, Clyde A. Milner II, and Charles E. Rankin, eds., *Trails: Toward A New Western History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991): 85-86.
[31] Limerick, 86.
[32] Gilman, 14.

> polities converged and competed, and where distinct cultures collided and occasionally coincided, the frontier unfolds the history of the Great West in ways that Turner never imagined.[33]

Kerwin Lee Klein has similarly redefined the frontier as "a zone of cultural interaction" rather than as either a fixed line or a boundless region.[34] Thus Aron and Klein imagine the frontier less in terms of geographic place (as Limerick and her nemesis, Turner, both did) than in terms of cultural boundaries: frontiers are the placeless imaginary spaces in which cultural interactions occur.

Gloria Anzaldúa, a Chicana poet who grew up along the U.S.-Mexico border in South Texas, has further refined the idea of the frontier as a "borderland," a permeable site of cultural interaction. Borderlands, she writes, may be physical and political, as the "Texas-U.S. Southwest/Mexican border," or they may be the "psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands" which "are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy."[35] While "borders" are established "to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*," a "borderland" is "a vague and undetermined place . . . in a constant state of transition."[36] Anzaldúa's borderland is multinational, multiracial and

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[33] Stephen Aron, "Lessons in Conquest: Towards a Greater Western History," *Pacific Historical Review* 63 (May 1994): 128.
[34] Kerwin Lee Klein, "Reclaiming the 'F' Word, or Being and Becoming Postwestern," *Pacific Historical Review* 65 (May 1996). Page numbers within this article were not included in the on-line text I retrieved from InfoTrac on 4 July 2000.
[35] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 3.
[36] Anzaldúa, ix.

multilingual; it is gendered and sexualized; it is simultaneously intimately personal and dangerously public. It is a place where distinctions between *us* and *them* lose their meaning in the process of personal and cultural interaction. Anzaldúa's frontier, then, her borderland, is anyplace, material or psychological, where intercultural collisions occur, and frontierspeople, the inhabitants of such a borderland, are those who, in any context, go out and encounter the "Other."

Such interpretations of the frontier as a cultural borderland rather than a geographic line suggest that frontierspeople – meaning those who confront "the Other" and not those who conquer the West – are perpetually self-defining, drawing imaginary lines around themselves that separate them from others. That is, they internalize the frontier, transforming what was a geographic, Turnerian dividing line between "civilization" and "savagery" into more subtle conceptual and symbolic boundaries distinguishing "Us" from "Them" or, as Anzaldúa suggests, dissolving those distinctions. As the essays in *Jewries at the Frontier* demonstrate, Jews draw and undraw such lines on frontiers around the world and across history, balancing the urge to acculturate with the competing urge to remain different. "Jews confront and are confronted," Gilman writes, "by the inhabitants of each land, from medieval Britain to Poland to China to India to Palestine."[37] The result is a variety of possible "Jewries," all equally valid. Rather than writing off frontier Jews as tragic examples of declension, then, a Jewish history built on the frontier idea allows us to see "peripheral" communities

[37] Gilman, 22.

like Texas as, in fact, central to Jewish history, part of a perpetual process to reimagine and revivify the meaning of Judaism in the Diaspora.

A number of examples attest to the potent intermingling of cultural experiences that occurs in Texas and the symbolic possibilities that the Texas Jewish experience can provide. In her contribution to a 1988 collection of essays about her Orthodox Jewish family, Ruth Geller Marlow, who grew up in El Paso, provided one such instance. She began by describing the physical environment in West Texas. "It is a valley with bare mountains surrounding it. There is no green lushness there. There is no water nearby; it is isolated, the closest large city 250-350 miles away. It is arid, very hot. The summers are hot, over 100 degrees daily, no humidity. Winters are cold – there are no fall or spring seasons."[38] Why so much climatic detail? "Because whenever I hear the stories of the Jews wandering in the desert, trying to come together as a people before entering the promised land, I *identify* with them." Here Marlow's frontier narrative took a decidedly inward turn. The Jews' time in the desert of Sinai, she said, "was a necessity in the formation of the Jewish nation" and, like them, "I was formed in the desert, as a person and as a Jew."[39] The desert was more than just an exterior setting for Marlow but had deep inner significance for her as well.

In a city with a very small Jewish population, moreover, Marlow said that she "truly felt [herself] as a minority in Christian America," an experience that

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[38] Judith Geller Marlow, "My Wandering Roots," in Shmuel Geller, *Mazkeres Ahavah: Remembrance of Love, A Biographical Account of Rabbi Yaakov and Sara Geller and Family* (Zichron Yaakov, Israel: Institute for Publication of Books, 1988): 121-22.
[39] Marlow, 122.

also "shaped my existence as a Jew."[40] Jewish identity for Marlow came, in part, by contrasting herself with the Christian majority, but it also arose from her difference, as an Orthodox Jew, from other Jewish El Pasoans. Like Jews throughout the nation who had sought to Americanize, Marlow said, El Paso Jews "kept, at most, the outer structure of Jewish life" but were missing "the richness and quality of the essence of being Jewish." The "daily rituals are performed in the shul," she wrote, "the form and structure are all there – but, for me, the soul was missing."[41] Marlow fixes her own Jewish identity, then, by triangulating herself against ancient Jews, contemporary El Paso Jews, and Christians, as well as against a forbidding natural environment.

That sense of something missing drove Marlow deeper into herself and toward her own vision of Jewish meaning. "What growing up there did for me," she said, "was make me want something *more* authentic. My experience gave me an appreciation of having a real Jewish experience and perhaps made it a need more acute than for those for whom it has always been available at their fingertips." Borrowing the language of centers and peripheries, Marlow saw El Paso as a peripheral and therefore less genuine Jewish experience than that available elsewhere. But she turned it into something much more. What she described as a "wasteland of a desert without water" was also the wellspring of her Jewish identity, the "foundation for me . . . for desiring more." She later found, in New York, the kind of Jewish community she had sought.[42] Marlow's

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[40] Ibid.

[41] Marlow, 122-23.

[42] Marlow, 124. In a memoir of her own childhood in Houston, Diane Ravitch made a similar observation. "The community at large was materialistic and anti-intellectual, as was my family.

narrative demonstrates both the risk and the opportunity that real and imaginary frontiers provide: as a Jew in a physically isolated place she was unable to find the kind of rich communal experience she wanted, but the very conditions that caused her distress allowed her to transform her experience not only into a positive one but a revelatory one. "I had to wander from the desert to New York to find that quality and essence," she said, "but I don't think I would have wanted it so much if I hadn't begun in the desert."[43]

In a brasher way, Kinky Friedman has built a career out of merging Texas and Jewish qualities into a unique and provocative persona. With his band, Kinky Friedman and the Texas Jewboys, Friedman released three albums between 1973 and 1976, broke a song, "Sold American," into the Country Top Ten, and appeared on the Grand Ol' Opry. The Jewboys were hardly, though, a typical country-western band. Friedman himself described them as "avant-garde" and "a cult band," and one early reviewer proclaimed them "the world's first Jewish-longhaired country band."[44] Lester Bangs, a music critic for *Rolling Stone*, praised the group's first record and hailed Kinky as "a stocky cigar-chomping Jew from Texas" who was "a true original, blessed with a distinctive wit and a manner

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There were few books in my house. . . . At college [at Wellesley] I came across an article by Milton Himmelfarb in *Commentary* (I was surprised to discover a Jewish magazine of ideas). It had to do with certain Jewish traditions like love of learning and social activism. I thought to myself, 'So *these* are Jewish traditions.' *I didn't know that*. The Jews I knew and grew up with didn't seem to be distinguished from non-Jews in either. There was no evidence of intellectual drive among the people I went to school with. My family was more liberal than most Texans (my parents always voted Democratic), but I didn't associate that with our religion." Diane Ravitch, "The Educational Critic in New York," in Bernard Rosenberg and Ernest Goldstein, eds., *Creators and Disturbers: Reminiscences By Jewish Intellectuals of New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982): 390-91.

[43] Marlow, 124.

[44] Alice Wightman, "Real Kinky," @*Austin* 1 (1997): 34; Bill Mann, "Are you ready for Kinky Friedman and the Texas Jewboys?" *Melody Maker* (8 December 1973).

of carrying himself both musically and personally that begins to resemble the mantle of a star."[45] Friedman's "macho, cigar-chewing posturing is classic," wrote London's *Melody Maker* magazine in 1973. "Wearing . . . a 10-gallon hat, a pearl-buttoned velvet shirt with tinted glasses, and cowboy boots with . . . gold Stars of David embroidered; there's no sight quite like it."[46] Friedman's style, which he called "Texas-Jewish flamboyance," accented Texan fashion accessories like hats, boots and belt buckles with recognizably Jewish symbols, displaying his wish to be conspicuously Texan and Jewish at the same time.[47]

Not everyone was as impressed as Bangs and other music critics with Friedman's persona. When the Texas Jewboys first came to national attention, Friedman received complaints about his liberal and unabashed use of the word "Jewboy," a term that in almost any context is disparaging.[48] It is a term of belittlement that charges Jewish men with childishness, simplicity, dependency, and weakness. In its common usage, it evokes the whole Jewish history of persecution and, in some measure, blames Jews for their own victimization: had they been more mature, more manly, perhaps they could have defended themselves more successfully.

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[45] Lester Bangs, Review of *Sold American*, *Rolling Stone* 137 (21 June 1973): 63.
[46] Mann, "Are you ready for Kinky Friedman and the Texas Jewboys?"
[47] Wightman, "Real Kinky," 36.
[48] In a 1989 interview with the *Los Angeles Times* Friedman recalled, "Many people never could get past . . . the name of the band. It got a lot of people's backs up." Sheldon Teitelbaum, "The Tale of a Kinky Cowboy Who Made Good," *Los Angeles Times* (15 October 1989). Also, in his 1973 review of *Sold American* in *Rolling Stone*, Lester Bangs observed that Friedman's "wry racial persona" had made it hard for him to find supporters among "a good many tradition-bound Jewish factions in the recording industry itself," many of whom "are still shuddering at the prospects of promoting an item called Kinky Friedman and His Texas Jewboys." Bangs, Review of *Sold American*, 63.

In the contexts in which Friedman used the term, however, particularly when he so frequently turned it on himself, it became less an insult than a deeply evocative and even empowering expression. In calling his band "Kinky Friedman and the Texas Jewboys," Friedman punned closely on the name of the western swing band "Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys," a group that revolutionized Texas popular music in the late 1930s and early 1940s. In Friedman's usage, then, the word "Jewboy" recalled the word "playboy" and borrowed some of its meaning. The anti-Semitic slur thus suggested something more masculine, more adult, more aggressive than the term standing alone could do. These were not, after all, simply "Jewboys," whose whole sad history was too familiar, but they were *Texas* Jewboys, a new breed, rougher and tougher than before. The term of belittlement was still there, of course, and still shocked, but through a deft pun Friedman turned it into its opposite, an expression, at least in a 1970s context, of masculine strength and sexual prowess. The pun suggested that acculturation into Texas culture had made the Jew manlier than ever before.

Friedman put the same pun to a more profound use in one of his most popular songs, "Ride'em, Jewboy," a piece that served as the band's theme song and which Lester Bangs praised as "both an anthem of ethnic pride and a hauntingly evocative slice of classic American folksong."[49] Released on Friedman's first album in 1973, it is a somber ballad to the victims of the Holocaust. The song is slow with a simple rhythm carried on an acoustic guitar, much in the style of cowboy campfire songs: its mood and sound resemble

[49] Bangs, Review of *Sold American*, 63.

"Home on the Range" as much as anything more recent. The lyric draws a comparison between the persecuted Jew and the mythic cowboy of the Texas prairie as Friedman fuses the cowboy's unrooted, solitary life into the Jews' history of oppression and forced migration:

> Ride, ride 'em Jewboy,
> Ride 'em all around the old corral.
> I'm, I'm with you boy
> If I've got to ride six million miles.[50]

On the surface, this could be any one of a hundred western folk ballads in the "git along little dogie" tradition, songs sung by cowboys on the cattle drive or, more likely, by Gene Autry in the movies. But again, Friedman adapts the word "Jewboy" to his own purposes, this time playing with the familiar cliché "ride'em, cowboy," and the pun makes the word far more than a term of disparagement. It tells the listener that this is a song with two contexts, Texan and Jewish, and allows double meanings to emerge from the song's imagery. Later in the song, a description of candles glowing in a window evokes both the prairie tradition of lighting a candle to help the wanderer find his way home and the lights of Sabbath or Chanukah; the "Jewboy" is reminded of a time "[w]hen on your sleeve you wore the yeller star," recalling both the badge of a western lawman and the identification tag of Jews in Nazi Europe; the singer's willingness to "ride six million miles" recalls the six million Jewish Holocaust victims; and, most ominously, "the smoke from camps a'risin'" is both the comforting image of a campfire in the wilderness and the horrific one of Nazi smokestacks. The pun in

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[50] Kinky Friedman, "Ride'em, Jewboy," *Old Testaments & New Revelations* (Fruit of the Tune Music, 1992), originally recorded 1973.

the title permits us to see these double images and defines the piece as a Holocaust memorial set in the tradition of American country-western music.

The juxtaposition of these two traditions, western campfire song and Holocaust commemoration, is a peculiar one, but it works. Borrowing the traditional scene of the cattle drive, Friedman casts Jews as the cattle – "helpless creatures on their way" who are "driven relentless 'round the world" and ultimately to the slaughter – and in doing so he calls attention to their dehumanization during the Holocaust and throughout history. Later they are "wild ponies" whose "dreams were broken, / Rounded up and made to move along." Friedman alludes to the whole Jewish history of abandonment and persecution, culminating in the Holocaust, and his use of the word "Jewboy," a familiar expression of weakness, underscores Jewish victimization.

Even as the word reminds the listener of Jewish helplessness in the face of the Nazi threat, however, it puns on "cowboy," a word weighted with very different meanings. When we see the figure the narrator addresses not as the cattle but as a fellow rider, the phrase "Ride'em, Jewboy" suggests a position of strength and power atop a horse in charge of the drive. The word is recast, then, giving the impression not of a Jewish victim but of a Jewish cowboy, a product of the Jewish past but with a cowboy's toughness and control. Drawing on the mythic history of the American West as a place of boundless opportunity and limitless futures, the narrator tells the Jewish cowboy that he will always remember his tragic past ("old memories still live behind ya," he says), but that he should not "let the morning [with a pun on 'mourning'] blind ya." With

stereotypically Texan optimism, the singer insists that "the road ahead [is] forever rolling" and that "anything worth cryin' can be smiled."

Friedman's creative use of the most familiar icons of both traditions and his clever manipulation of their imagery draw the two together in an unexpected and meaningful way. Both the Jewish and the cowboy traditions, as presented here, involve wandering, restlessness, loneliness, regret, and loss. The cowboy and the Jewboy are both melancholy figures, haunted by the past, isolated from society, and cut adrift from community. In the Jewish tradition this is, of course, a tragic experience, a reminder of ancient persecution. But by blending that interpretation with Texas frontier imagery, Friedman presents a distinctively Texan Jew with a distinctively Texan Jewish memory: the tragic past is part of who he is, but as a Jewish cowboy rather than simply a "Jewboy," he need not be crippled by it.

Not all Texas Jews, to be sure, were as explicit as Friedman and Marlow in describing themselves as distinctively Texan. The symbolic boundaries by which Marlow and Friedman defined their Jewish identities, however, have subtler correlates in virtually everything that Jewish Texans have done throughout their history. The process of defining themselves across imagined frontiers, of establishing and maintaining conceptual boundaries that define them in contrast to other Jews and to other Texans is characteristic of the Texas Jewish experience. Like the residents of Gloria Anzaldúa's borderland, the ethnic, religious and linguistic identities of Texas Jews shade off at the edges into qualities acquired from other groups; in turn, Jewish Texans have contributed their particular

historical perspective to the development of Texas society as a whole. The chapters that follow trace not only the historical experience of Jewish Texans but the continual evolution of their sense of themselves as particular kinds of Jews and particular kinds of Texans.

Chapter 1. *Los Judíos en la Frontera*

By some accounts, the history of Judaism in the United States began in Texas. In 1578, nearly 75 years before the first boat carrying Jewish refugees from Brazil arrived in the harbor of New Amsterdam, the Spanish Crown granted an enormous land charter in New Spain, including much of what is now northern Mexico and South Texas extending as far north as the outpost of San Antonio, to a Christian descendant of Portuguese Jews. Don Luis de Carvajal had been born in Portugal to New Christian parents, Jews who had converted to Catholicism perhaps by choice, though more likely under threat of punishment by the Spanish Inquisition. Don Luis traveled and worked throughout Portugal and Spain, and after a series of business setbacks decided to sail for Mexico with a cargo of Spanish wine to sell there. With the proceeds, he purchased a cattle ranch near Panúco, and soon became the mayor of Tampico. While serving in this post, Carvajal led an expedition against a group of British pirates who had washed ashore after suffering defeat at sea against Spanish vessels; with far fewer numbers, Carvajal captured eighty-eight prisoners whom he turned over to the authorities in Mexico City. In 1576, Carvajal led attacks against the Chichimecas Indians which opened northern Mexico to Spanish colonization. As a reward for these patriotic exploits, the Spanish king granted Carvajal the right to subjugate 40,000 square leagues of territory, which Carvajal proclaimed the New Kingdom of Leon, to oversee it as governor, and to colonize it with Spanish and Portuguese settlers.

Ordinarily, Spanish land grants in the New World required that potential colonists be Old Christians rather than converts to the Holy Faith, but a loophole in Carvajal's charter omitted this requirement. As a result, probably without Carvajal's knowledge, many of the hundred or so settlers who accompanied him to the new kingdom were former Jews. While Carvajal himself was a faithful Christian – he may even have been unaware of his own Jewish roots – many of his colonists were not, and Carvajal's kingdom, far from the center of Inquisitional power in Mexico City and even further from the Spanish Crown in Madrid, provided refuge for dozens of crypto-Jewish families, New Christians who continued practicing the Jewish faith in secret. The Inquisition discovered and punished many of them over the succeeding decades, and Don Luis himself suffered imprisonment for his role, however unknowing, in harboring them.[1] Some contemporary historians have argued that the descendants of these secret Jews continue to live in Mexico and South Texas today, practicing Catholicism while retaining elements of Jewish ritual in the form of peculiar family customs whose origins are long forgotten.[2]

These obscure and unverifiable beginnings of Jewish life in Texas occurred within the larger context of Spanish colonization in the New World and of the particular place that Jews inhabited within Spanish colonial society. For

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[1] For the history of the Carvajal family and colony, see Martin A. Cohen, "The Autobiography of Luis De Carvajal, the Younger," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 55 (March 1966): 277-318; Seymour B. Liebman, *The Enlightened: The Writings Of Luis De Carvajal, El Mozo* (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1967); Martin A. Cohen, *The Martyr* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1973); and Harriet and Fred Rochlin, *Pioneer Jews: A New Life In The Far West* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984).

[2] See, for example, Carlos Montalvo Larralde, *Chicano Jews In South Texas* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California at Los Angeles, 1978); Richard G. Santos, "Chicanos of Jewish Descent in Texas," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly* 15 (July 1983): 327-333.

three hundred years, beginning in 1521 when the *conquistador* Hernán Cortés destroyed the Aztecs, and continuing until 1821 when the Republic of Mexico won independence from the Spanish Crown, Texas was a remote and almost entirely unknown province of New Spain, a broad colonial territory extending from the islands of the Caribbean to California, from Chile to Colorado. New Spain was governed by a viceroy in Mexico City who answered in turn to the monarchy in Madrid, but in actuality the viceroys enforced the law loosely and unevenly: far from royal authority, it was easy to forget that they were not the highest earthly power in the colonies. As such, the sprawling empire they oversaw became a destination not only for *conquistadors* and missionaries seeking gold and native souls, but for fugitives from Spanish law, including people whose ethnic or religious differences made them outcasts in an increasingly orthodox Spanish society. Among them were some of the first Jews to arrive in the New World.

Medieval Spain had been a tremendously diverse society where Jews, Muslims and Christians lived side by side in a region dominated by enlightened Arab rulers. During centuries of religious tolerance, the Jews had integrated themselves fully into Spanish life and had achieved an unprecedented degree of prosperity, power and social acceptance. "If there were such a thing as *the* Spaniard," writes historian Seymour Liebman, "*the* Jew was the Spaniard in every sense of the word. He possessed all the virtues and vices of the Hispanic people."[3] Medieval Spain provided a kind of spiritual center in which Jews could

[3] Seymour B. Liebman, *The Jews in New Spain: Faith, Flame, and the Inquisition* (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1970): 19-20.

be fully themselves while adhering comfortably to the customs of the country in which they lived: their Jewish historical origins and religious faith, if anything, made them even more deeply part of a society characterized as much by differences as by commonalities.

Throughout the Middle Ages, however, Christian Spaniards engaged in a campaign, the *reconquista*, to expel the Arabs and to establish Christian rule throughout the Iberian Peninsula. In 1492, with the seizure of Granada at the southern coast of Spain, the *reconquista* was complete and Ferdinand and Isabella, dual monarchs of a unified nation, sought new fields to conquer. The voyage of Christopher Columbus, which they sponsored the same year, provided them, however accidentally, with a new empire to control and to exploit; and with the Muslim threat eliminated, the monarchs, devout Roman Catholics, turned with renewed vigor to assuring the supremacy of the Holy Faith throughout their realm.

In this climate, Jews became the targets of official efforts to transform them into Christians: forced conversions began in 1390, and in 1480 the Roman Church joined the Crown in establishing the Spanish Inquisition to punish those whose conversions proved insincere or inconstant. Under threat of torture or death, some 250,000 Spanish Jews made official conversion to Christianity. With the conclusion of the *reconquista* in 1492, the monarchs declared Judaism illegal, forcing Jewish Spaniards to choose either immediate conversion, as another

50,000 did, or exile. Some 200,000 Jews, refusing to convert, fled the country and dispersed throughout parts of Europe and the Muslim world.[4]

When the Inquisition and the monarchy to which they had long been faithful forcibly changed them into *conversos* and criminalized their religious differences, Spanish Jews faced a difficult realignment of the internal psychological and symbolic markers that had distinguished them from others in their society. They were now Spaniards whom the Spanish Crown despised, Jews who had become unwilling Christians (or Christians who were actually Jews), people deeply rooted in Spanish history and at home in Spanish culture but nevertheless outcasts in their own country. Despite their conversion, many "New Christians" still faced hostility from "Old Christians" who suspected, often with justification, that the *conversos* remained unrepentant Jews who had no wish to assimilate into the enforced homogeneity of Christian Spain. At the same time, Jews who chose exile over conversion derided the converts as *marranos*, "swine," who had abandoned their faith to seek the favor of Christians.

This double-edged attack led many *conversos* to keep their true religious sentiments private, to assume the appearance of devout Christians while practicing their illegal faith covertly, sometimes keeping these practices secret even from their own families. Balancing these conflicting loyalties – being Jewish and not Jewish at the same time, slipping between one and the other as circumstances warranted, or even being unaware of the Jewish origins of one's own family – became integral to the Jewish experience in Spain after 1492.

[4] Rochlin, 1.

Without leaving home, they had become a peripheral people, a frontier people, separated forever from the cultural center that had once provided them with a sense of security and belonging.

As Spanish citizens began colonizing the New World, countless *conversos* were among them. "They emigrated to Mexico partly because of economic opportunities," historian Arnold Wiznitzer has written, "but mainly in order to live far away from the suspicious eyes of their Christian neighbors and acquaintances, so that they might be able to follow and to practice secretly the religion of their ancestors."[5] Many such "crypto-Jews" were among the colonists who followed Luis de Carvajal, himself unaware of his own Jewish ancestry, into northern Mexico to establish the New Kingdom of Leon; several of them, along with Carvajal himself, were later punished by the Mexican Inquisition as "Judaizers." As Harriet Rochlin has written, "[t]he first settlers of Jewish descent to enter what is now the American Southwest," including South Texas, "were, in all likelihood, Carvajal's colonizers fleeing the collapsing 'kingdom' and the fiery stake."[6] The necessary secrecy of their lives explains why the crypto-Jews of Mexico and of the American Southwest never revealed themselves publicly as Jews and why they have virtually disappeared from the historical record: the Jews of modern Mexico, and of modern Texas, are not the descendants of these Sephardic crypto-Jewish colonists but of later European and American immigrants. The model they established, however, of a people whose authentic

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[5] Arnold Wiznitzer, "Crypto-Jews in Mexico during the Sixteenth Century," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 41 (1962): 168.
[6] Rochlin, 1.

Jewishness was always in doubt, typified the way Jewish life perpetuated itself on the frontier that became Texas and on countless other frontiers throughout the world.

Since it first entered European consciousness in the sixteenth century, Texas has been a quintessential frontier. Originally the distant northern edge of Spanish holdings in the New World, it was sparsely populated by Spanish settlers and was often considered as much a burden to provincial administrators in Mexico City as an asset. The only major Spanish settlement in Texas was the mission outpost of San Antonio de Bexar, established around 1690 in order to Catholicize native peoples in the area and to serve as a *de facto* capital of the region. As the French population grew to the east in Louisiana, Spain became increasingly concerned about French encroachments into Spanish Texas. To defend against the threat, Spain established military outposts near the Spanish-French border – actually a sizable disputed territory rather than boundary line – at La Bahía (Goliad) and Nacogdoches. With the exception of these small and distant outposts, the true fringe of its new-world empire, Spain had little interest in colonizing the region. It was extremely difficult to find soldiers, let alone citizen-colonists, who were interested in settling in such a forbidding place, so far from the familiar communities to the south, threatened on one side by increasingly territorial native tribes and on the other by occasionally violent French colonists. For the time being, it was enough for the region to remain a massive buffer zone, virtually unpopulated by Europeans. When, in the last days of the French and Indian War, France transferred the Louisiana Territory to Spain,

the buffer became unnecessary and Spanish interest in the area languished even further. At the dawn of the nineteenth century, the region was home to fewer than 5,000 Spanish-speaking inhabitants.

The situation changed, though, when France reclaimed the Louisiana Territory and almost immediately, in 1803, sold it to the United States, which began right away to explore and settle it. Suddenly what had been an ambiguously defined region between the imperialistic claims of distant European powers became an actual international border between New Spain and the United States, a young nation that made no secret of its wish to expand westward. The Spanish Crown began immediately to fortify its holdings in Texas against the perceived American threat. Texas was rapidly developing its character as a cultural crossroads, a borderland region in which Spanish, French, native, and U.S. interests collided and interacted.

When Mexico, including Texas, declared independence from Spain in 1821, the new government sought ways to subdue and cultivate the wilderness on their northern frontier between San Antonio and Nacogdoches. To accomplish this, Mexican authorities promoted immigration into the region by anyone, including Americans and Europeans, who was willing to live there and to establish permanent residence. To this end, they granted large tracts of land to *empresarios*, independent colonization agents who in turn were responsible for recruiting potential colonists, moving them to the area, parceling out individual tracts, settling them on the grants, providing whatever supplies and building materials were needed, and overseeing the development of the colony.

Technically, the land remained the property of the Mexican government, and the *empresarios*, who contracted with that government, were bound by Mexican law. In practice, however, *empresario* colonies were largely autonomous, with the *empresarios* having near total control over how their colonies functioned on a day-to-day basis. Mexican law remained in force in the colonies, but the colonists frequently ignored it.

Among the laws that officially governed the *empresarios* and their colonies was a provision that required settlers in Mexico to be adherents to the Catholic faith. The Mexican constitution declared that "[t]he religion of the Mexican nation is, and will be perpetually, the Roman Catholic Apostolic," and that "[t]he nation will protect it by wise and just laws, and prohibit the exercise of any other whatsoever."[7] In 1827, the State of Coahuila & Texas adopted its own constitution that reiterated the primacy of Catholicism and prohibited the exercise of any other religion. Under the terms of these constitutions, governments expected non-Mexican immigrants to become Mexican citizens and to make official conversion to the Roman Catholic Church. These requirements were repugnant to many American colonists. One potential settler described the mixed blessing by which he "might easily obtain a quarter of a league of unappropriated land" if he was willing to profess the Roman Catholic religion and become a Mexican citizen – "but not otherwise."[8] While the same writer acknowledged a certain "laxity . . . in executing the laws," this did little to ease his mind. As long

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[7] Quoted in Stanley Chyet, "Political Rights of Jews in the United States: 1776-1840," *American Jewish Archives* 10 (April 1958): 52.

[8] Anonymous, *Visit To Texas: Being The Journal Of A Traveller Through Those Parts Most Interesting To American Settlers* (Readex Microprint, 1966 [1834]): 53.

as the religious laws remained on the books, he wrote, "they may be at any time put in force [and if] known as Protestants, [colonists] might at any time be deprived of their estates."[9]

Many Americans and Europeans, however, were willing either to make a sincere conversion or to take their chances by converting officially but continuing to practice their own faith, or no faith. Mexican authorities, anxious to populate the region and lacking the zeal of the Inquisition, were generally willing to look the other way as immigrants did so. This loophole in enforcement opened the door of Mexican Texas not only to American Protestants but to a handful of Jews as well. Like the Sephardim who had preceded them centuries before, the very remoteness of Texas and the laxity of law enforcement there made it a suitable destination for people whose religious origins, if not their actual beliefs, made them potential outcasts.

The first of the *empresario* contracts included at least one Jewish settler and his family. In the last years before the Mexican Revolution, the Spanish Crown granted a claim to Moses Austin, a Connecticut-born miner who had helped establish a mining colony in Missouri. After suffering a severe financial setback, Austin traveled to San Antonio to try to gain permission to establish a colony in Spanish Texas. After much arguing with officials, who feared Anglo encroachments into their possessions, Austin succeeded in convincing them that it was, in fact, in their interest to ratify a colonization scheme for Austin to direct. When Austin died soon after completing the difficult journey back to Missouri to

[9] Anonymous, 104.

begin recruiting colonists, he charged his 27-year-old son, Stephen, with carrying on the work of organizing the colony.

Stephen F. Austin inherited permission from the Crown to claim a huge tract of land of his own choosing, and he selected a broad range in Southeast Texas bounded by the road from San Antonio to Nacogdoches on one side and the Gulf of Mexico on the other. It was good, arable land, and there was enough of it for Austin to offer his colonists tracts of a size then unheard-of in the United States. Word of the opportunity quickly spread in the U.S., as well as among the scattered American families who had already claimed squatters' rights on plots deep within Spanish territory. In 1821, the newly independent Mexican authorities ratified the Spanish grant in Stephen's name, and he began the process of populating the colony. It eventually included about 300 families, the "Old 300" that represent the beginning of official Anglo-American habitation in Texas.

Among these original 300 families was at least one that could claim Jewish lineage. Samuel Isaacks was born in Tennessee in 1804 and ventured to Texas about fifteen years later, settling illegally on the Brazos River within what later became the Austin Colony. When Austin arrived to claim the area, he drafted Isaacks and his family into the colony, and Isaacks received about 4,600 acres of land ("a league and a labor") in what is today Fort Bend County. He later served in the war for Texas independence, received some land in Polk or Angelina County, and eventually lived and worked in the tiny village of Houston.[10]

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[10] Henry Cohen, "Settlement of the Jews in Texas," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 2 (1894): 10; Natalie Ornish, *Pioneer Jewish Texans* (Dallas: Texas Heritage Press, 1989): 132; Ruthe Winegarten and Cathy Schechter, *Deep in the Heart* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1990): 7.

There is scant documentation of the religious affiliation of Samuel Isaacks or his family, but a number of historians have identified them as Jews. Henry Cohen, the prominent Galveston rabbi who was the first to do so in print, provided no source for his conclusion. Ruthe Winegarten and Cathy Schechter report a "300-year-old family tradition that the Isaacks family were Welsh Jews" but offer no further evidence.[11] As illegal squatters on Mexican land, Isaacks and his family were free to practice any religion they chose. Once he became a recipient of land in the Austin Colony, however, Isaacks would have been expected to make an official profession of Catholicism, an explicit requirement of Austin's agreement with the Mexican government.

Because the Austin Colony was something of an exception to the rule, however – the first *empresario* grant and one that Mexican officials wanted to see succeed – it might not have been necessary in practice for Isaacks to become a Christian. According to Texas historian T.R. Fehrenbach, Moses Austin and the Spanish officials who first approved his grant "had a clear understanding," however unwritten, that "the American colonists would be substantial and law-abiding people" and that "the requirement of the Roman Catholic religion would not be enforced." Neither Moses Austin nor Stephen after him, Fehrenbach claims, "made any secret of the fact that they were Protestants." Stephen learned quickly to present a surface appearance of adhering to the law, but he made no effort to require his colonists to change their religious affiliation. Fehrenbach cites one Austin colonist who claimed that "not one-tenth of the American

[11] Winegarten and Schechter, 7.

immigrants [in the Austin colony] ever adopted the Catholic faith" and that those few who did "did so for either politics or appearances."[12] If Samuel Isaacks had ever been a Jew, it seems he had the freedom to remain so in the Austin Colony; if Isaacks and his family were in fact Jewish, then they were almost certainly the first permanent Jewish settlers in Texas.

While it is impossible to verify the religious identification of Samuel Isaacks and his family, there is more reason to accept a later appearance of Jewish activity in Mexican Texas. The first report of open and self-conscious Jewish life in Texas comes from Abraham C. Labatt, a remarkably well-traveled character who helped establish synagogues in South Carolina, New Orleans and San Francisco. Labatt was engaged in a trading business in New Orleans in the early 1830s which took him briefly to the small community of Velasco on the Texas Gulf Coast near what is now Corpus Christi. In Velasco, Labatt met two merchants whom he identified as Jews: Jacob Henry, an immigrant from England, and Jacob Lyons from Charleston, South Carolina. Labatt himself was actively Jewish, and the fact that he was able to recognize Henry and Lyons as fellow Jews indicates that they were in some way practicing the faith, or at least that they were willing to identify themselves to Labatt as Jews. There is some evidence that Labatt himself may have returned to Velasco to live, indicating that there was enough Jewish activity in the town to satisfy a man who had participated in some

[12] T.R. Fehrenbach, *Lone Star* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1968): 137. Although his monumental Texas history has no footnotes, Fehrenbach is a wholly reliable authority on details of this kind. It is likely, therefore, that Harold Sharfman is incorrect when he reports, without documentation, that "Austin and his colonists, Isaacs included, had gone through the ceremony of affiliation with the Roman Church." I. Harold Sharfman, *Jews On The Frontier* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1977): 237.

of the most prominent Jewish communities in the South and West.[13] This tiny Mexican coastal settlement, then, represents the beginning of true Jewish community in Texas, though the practice of Judaism remained outside the bounds of Mexican law.

Once the Austin Colony set the pattern, other *empresarios* took on the task of populating Mexico's northernmost territory with American colonists. By 1830, when the Mexican government called a brief end to the system, it had been responsible for bringing some 20,000 white citizens and their slaves into the area – a non-Mexican population that outnumbered the Spanish-speaking population by a ratio of five to one.[14] In addition to those colonists who went to Texas by arrangement of an *empresario*, thousands of settlers poured into the area on an individual basis – "unorganized folk movements responding to the lure of letters and rumors."[15] Many were fugitives from American justice, criminals seeking refuge and a new start in the relatively unpatrolled frontier. Of the newcomers, legal and illegal, most were Americans, and of these most were Southern, particularly from the neighboring states of Arkansas and Louisiana, as well as a large number from Tennessee. The Port of New Orleans served as an important way station, attracting migrants from all parts of the U.S. on their way to the Texas ports of Galveston and Indianola. Few arrived in Texas directly from

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[13] Cathy [Schechter] to Ruthe [Winegarten], Ginger [Jacobs], Jimmy [Kessler] (11 February 1987), Texas Jewish Historical Society Records, The Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin [cited hereafter as TJHS and CAH] Box 3A173, Folder 3; Henry Cohen, "Settlement of the Jews in Texas," 139; Sharfman, 254.

[14] Fehrenbach, 151. Bobby D. Weaver suggests a four-to-one ratio in the same period, perhaps omitting the slave population. Bobby Weaver, *Castro's Colony: Empresario Development In Texas, 1842-1865* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1985): xii-xiii .

[15] D.W. Meinig, *Imperial Texas: An Interpretive Essay In Cultural Geography* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969): 45.

Europe; the Atlantic crossing was a difficult and dangerous one, and few chose to remain on the boats for the extra days it took to reach Texas from East Coast ports.

Jewish participation in *empresario* arrangements was minimal. Those Jews who had settled in other parts of the United States, especially in the South, which provided the bulk of *empresario* colonists, were urban merchants and business people. They were rarely skilled or experienced as farmers or builders, the occupations the *empresarios* considered most valuable. As Jacob de Cordova, an early Jewish Texan and land speculator observed in 1858, "Texas is essentially an agricultural country, [and so] immigration of the Children of Israel is very limited."[16] In addition, it is likely that the conversion requirements set down by the Mexican government dissuaded many American Jews from participating in immigration schemes which would better enable Mexican officials to enforce the legalities.[17]

Within the growing number of independent settlers, however, was a handful of Jews who appear to have blended seamlessly into the mainstream of American and European immigration to Texas. Mexican authorities made no distinction between Jews and other immigrants, provided they made the required religious and political conversions. Thus Jewish immigrants arrived, as Harriet

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[16] Elaine Maas, "The Jews of Houston: An Ethnographic Study" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Rice University, 1973): 27n.13. Maas cites as her source Helena Frenkil Schlam, "The Early Jews of Houston" (Master's Thesis, Ohio State University, 1971): 31.

[17] In typed field notes from a trip to Brownsville in 1988, Ruthe Winegarten referred to an unnamed professor at Texas Pan American University who believed "that Mexico's insistence that immigrants had to be Catholic is responsible for various ethnic groups, including Jews, not settling in large numbers in Mexico, and consequently retarding the development of Mexico, thus depriving Mexico of industrial and progressive elements." TJHS Box 3A169, Folder 6.

Rochlin has observed, "not as banished and despised members of Hispanic society [as fugitives from the Spanish Inquisition had done previously] but as Americans or as the Europeans who came with them." And if the government made no distinction, neither did Texas's Mexican population. According to Rochlin, these Jews' Mexican neighbors saw no difference between them and other whites: "Indeed, when conflicts did erupt, they were despised not as 'Judíos' but as aggressive and usurpative 'gringos.'"[18] Partly because of the pre-Diasporic history of Judaism in Spain, Mexican people were at least passingly familiar with Judaism and often more comfortable with Jews than with members of other religious minorities. "They call us Jews," remarked a Protestant visitor to Texas is 1848, "for they have never had an idea of any other religion than their own; and, as they never saw our marriages celebrated, supposed we lived in concubinage or had been married according to the Jewish rites."[19]

As the Anglo population of Mexican Texas increased, then, Texas Jews existed not only along the national boundary between the United States and Mexico and in the permeable geographic zone between Anglo and Mexican dominance, but also in an internalized borderland between ways of life and between personal identifications. They were members of a white minority among Mexicans, but also of a Jewish minority among whites. As they negotiated these interactions, few if any Texas Jews managed to live anything resembling a traditional or even recognizable Jewish life. Moreover, as long as Texas remained a relatively unsettled frontier under Spanish or Mexican law, it was officially

[18] Rochlin, 9.
[19] Quoted in Sharfman, 259.

hostile to anyone seeking non-Catholic religious activity. As a result, no clear documentation exists of anyone openly practicing Judaism in Texas in the periods of Spanish or Mexican rule.

When the Republic of Texas won its independence in 1836, however, a more familiar, American-style democratic government came to oversee the process of colonization. The new republic's declaration of independence guaranteed religious freedom, complaining that Santa Ana's tyrannical government had prohibited "the right of worshipping the Almighty according to the dictates of our own conscience, by the support of a national religion calculated to promote the temporal interest of its human functionaries rather than the glory of the true and living God."[20] The new republican constitution required that "no preference shall be given by law to any religious denomination or mode of worship over another, but every person shall be permitted to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience."[21] To be sure, the framers of the Texas Constitution intended to preserve a Protestant right of worship among the nation's largely Catholic population, but the new republic's promise of religious freedom would extend to Jews as well. News of the Republic's tolerance policy was reported in the European Jewish press, and American promoters of Jewish immigration recognized Texas as a suitable destination for Jewish migrants.[22]

Nevertheless, Jewish migration to Texas in the years of the Republic remained low. Jewish immigrants continued to avoid organized colonization

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[20] Quoted in Chyet, 52.
[21] Ibid.
[22] See, for example, "Constitution du Texas," *Archives Israelites de France* (Paris), vol. 7 (1846): 654; Isaac Leeser, "The Prospect," *The Occident* 4 (September 1846): 270.

schemes, even as these proliferated under the new government. Following the example of Mexican officials, Texas leaders seeking to encourage the population of their vast territory granted charters to organizations of all kinds, providing land for settlement at very low cost to the colonists themselves. In addition to promoting immigration among Americans, the Texas Republic opened its doors to Europeans as well. In particular, large numbers of Germans arrived, usually as part of schemes arranged in Germany to promote migration and agricultural settlement in America. Agencies like the Society For The Protection Of German Immigrants In Texas (*Adelsverein*) established many German towns on the Texas frontier in the 1830s and 1840s, most notably Fredericksburg, New Braunfels, and Industry. These settlements tended to be exclusive and homogeneous, often consisting of entire families or settlers from the same towns, and they were overwhelmingly Protestant. It is a paradox of the land grant system that Germans were so plentiful among new Texans but that German Jews were not among them. The handful of Jews who made their way to Texas before and during the years of the Republic went as independent adventurers seeking whatever opportunities were available to them, and so they have proven exceedingly difficult to isolate and to identify as Jews.

This fact is not surprising, considering the Jewish world out of which many of these early Texas Jews came. Western and Central European Jewry in the nineteenth century, the period of political emancipation and of the development of Reform Judaism, was undergoing a decisive change during which, as Shmuel Ettinger writes, “each and every Jew living in one of the

European countries was confronted with the problem of his attitude both towards his own people and society and towards the people among whom he dwelt." [23] European Jews, emboldened by increasingly liberal legal conditions that allowed them fuller participation in European education, public affairs, and economic activity, sought to enjoy more fully the benefits of European citizenship. To do so, many of them willingly disregarded or concealed their Jewish origins. At issue was nothing less than the question of whether Jews would continue to exist as a distinct people or would integrate entirely into European culture. Most, as Ettinger explains, "chose neither of the extremes, but preferred a series of varied attempts at simultaneous loyalty to both frameworks and a desire to be integrated into both."[24] Thus Judaism became, for many European Jews, not so much a profound quality of personal history and identity as a character trait, a quirk of family descent that one could emphasize or deny at will. In the name of social integration and economic opportunity, in fact, many were prepared to barter it away entirely.

Many of the European Jews who migrated to the United States in the early nineteenth century had accepted this trade, venturing far from European centers of Jewish religion and intellectual activity to seek their fortunes in a frontier nation. Those who passed through American cities into the West entered a true frontier, a dynamic and heterogeneous society where one's origins were only what one claimed them to be. The first European Jews to appear in the Republic of Texas

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[23] Shmuel Ettinger, "Integration into the Non-Jewish World in the Nineteenth Century," in H.H. Ben-Sasson, ed., *A History of the Jewish People* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976): 825.
[24] Ibid.

shared with their emancipated European families an ambivalence toward Jewish identification and religious practice that made them difficult to identify as Jews but which suited them in many ways for the frontier environment they entered.

Henry Cohen, the first researcher to write about Jewry in Texas and still the one who gave the most attention to this early period, found only a few Jews in the Texas Republic. Simon M. Schloss, for example, whose birth Cohen places in Frankfort-am-Main, moved to Texas in 1836 and pursued "the real estate business." Albert Emanuel, born in Germany, traveled to New Orleans and then in 1834 to Texas, where he supported himself through "mercantile pursuits." Sam Maas, originally of Germany, passed through New Orleans in January of 1836 on his way to Nacogdoches, where he was a "merchant" and later "entered the real estate business." Jacob Mussina "engaged in mercantile pursuits" in Galveston and later in Austin. His brother Simon "engaged in various callings," including law and "a real estate business" in Galveston. Isadore Dyer, born in Dessau, Germany, moved to Galveston in 1840 and "engaged in mercantile pursuits."[25]

From the few individuals that Rabbi Cohen identified, a number of generalities present themselves about the Jews of the Republic of Texas. First, most were Western European by birth, though none traveled directly to Texas, arriving instead after settling first in other American communities. Secondly,

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[25] Henry Cohen, "Settlement of the Jews in Texas," 143-47. Cohen rarely documents his sources, so it is impossible to trace his research back to primary documents. It is likely that most of his information came from personal conversations with survivors of the early period or their families. In his obituary of Cohen, Jacob Rader Marcus noted that "Cohen had come to Texas before the Jewish Founding Fathers had all died off. Writing Texas Jewish history, then, was in some measure the recording of the lives of men and women who were his older contemporaries." Jacob R. Marcus, "Henry Cohen (1863-1952)," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 42 (June 1953): 453.

they were clearly drawn to what Cohen repeatedly describes as "mercantile pursuits": unlike most immigrants to Texas at the time, none were farmers or laborers. Finally, and most importantly, these Jews appear to have had a very loose attachment to the practices and traditions of Judaism or to have ignored them altogether. Cohen noted without comment, for example, that the sister of Jacob and Simon Mussina "married the Rev. Mr. Henderson, the first Presbyterian minister at Galveston."[26] He remarked that Isadore Dyer hosted the first Jewish religious services in Galveston at his home, but not until 1856, years after arriving in Texas. Cohen had nothing to say about the religious activities of Schloss, Emanuel, Maas, or the Mussina brothers. Modernity had worked its magic on these European Jews, and they had sought out the American frontier for the economic advantages it offered, even as it made the meaningful practice of Judaism impossible.

Building on Cohen's identifications, later historians have elaborated on the biographies of a few Jews in Mexican and Republican Texas, though these, too, exhibited few clear outward signs of their Jewishness. Albert Moses Levy was one of the most conspicuous of these Jewish pioneers, arriving during the war for Texas independence and serving as a surgeon in General Houston's army. While Levy's parents and siblings were active in the Sephardic synagogue in Richmond, Virginia, Albert himself revealed no signs of Jewish faith or practice during his years in Texas. His marriage to an Episcopalian woman in Matagorda, Texas, and the baptisms of his children suggest that he made little or no effort to sustain a

[26] Henry Cohen, "Settlement of the Jews in Texas," 146.

Jewish life.[27] Other early Texans whom historians have identified as Jews include the *empresario* Henri Castro, an Alsatian descendant of Jewish converts to Catholicism who established a settler colony and the town of Castroville near San Antonio; Herman Ehrenberg and Avram Wolf, who were enlisted in the Texas Army and were involved in engagements before and during the Mexican siege of the Alamo; Eugene Chimene, who fought in the Battle of San Jacinto; and David Kokernot, a Dutch immigrant trained as a riverboat pilot on the Mississippi who briefly commanded a schooner in the Texas Navy and participated in several land battles, including the Grass Fight in 1835. The records of these men's participation in signal events in Texas history are clear, but their identification with Judaism is much less certain. In several cases, Cohen's inclusion of them in his early historical essays stands as the only evidence of their Jewishness.

Ambiguities plague any effort to certify the Jewish background of early Texans largely because these pioneers, as is often the case, were disconnected from the communal institutions of established civilization. They were breakers of the wilderness, and although some were men and women of refinement and gentility, they were nevertheless people who chose a life of remoteness, discomfort and potential danger. They may have been the first *de facto* Texas Jews, but until Texas cities received enough Jewish settlers to establish permanent and active religious communities, Jewish religious identity had little real meaning. In the meantime, Jews in Texas lived on an internalized frontier – an interior

[27] Daniel N. Leeson, "In Search of the History of the Texas Patriot Moses A. Levy, Part I," *Western States Jewish History* 4 (July 1989): 291-306; Daniel N. Leeson, "In Search of the History of the Texas Patriot Moses A. Levy, Part II," *Western States Jewish History* 22 (Oct 1989): 22-37; Saul Viener, "Surgeon Moses Albert Levy: Letters of a Texas Patriot," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 46 (September 1956): 101-113.

version of the borderland between wilderness and civilization, between Texas and America, between white and Mexican. In this borderland of identity, they could choose to acknowledge their Jewishness in public or in private or not at all, and if unrevealed it would remain unnoticed. They could in fact be both Jew and non-Jew simultaneously, or alternately as circumstances required. The complex question, then, of "Who is a Jew?" was made irrelevant on the Texas frontier: such identification was too mutable to categorize.

The best example of the fluidity of Jewish identity on the Texas frontier is Adolphus Sterne, a German immigrant who arrived in Texas in the early 1820s and spent most of his adult life in Nacogdoches, then the dominant city of eastern Texas. Sterne is one of the heroes of Henry Cohen's early histories of Jewish Texans, and Cohen rapturously quotes long passages from works detailing Sterne's activities on behalf of Texas independence. In the pages he dedicates to Sterne, however, Cohen never once makes his Jewishness explicit. Sterne was in fact a man of true religious conviction, though of no particular denomination. His exact religious affiliation has consistently eluded historians of early Texas who have relied precariously upon each other's assumptions and misattributions. Possibly on Cohen's authority, Marquis James, a biographer of Sterne's friend and compatriot Sam Houston, identified Sterne as "a rosy little Rhineland Jew," apparently a description of James's own creation, as he neither places it in quotes nor provides a citation.[28] Years later, M.K. Wisehart, another Houston biographer, called Sterne "a little rosy-cheeked Jew," clearly paraphrasing

[28] Marquis James, *The Raven: A Biography of Sam Houston* (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1929): 196.

James.[29] Archie McDonald, in his introduction to Sterne's diary, remarks that Sterne was "much more than the 'rosy little Jew' that he is so often called by Houston biographers," probably meaning James and Wisehart.[30] Finally, in a remarkable historiographical mistake, Ruthe Winegarten and Cathy Schechter claimed that *Sam Houston himself* had referred to Sterne as "the rosy little Jew."[31] If Houston, who knew Sterne intimately, had made such a statement, it would have put to rest any question of Sterne's religious affiliation, but he simply never did. In spite of an apparent wish among historians to claim Sterne unequivocally as a Jew, the facts of his life and his own descriptions of himself reveal a far more complex and amorphous identity. As a man of the frontier, Sterne drew on many religious traditions to find his place, crossing easily over the imaginary boundaries that separated one religious group from another.

Sterne was born in Cologne in 1801 to a Lutheran mother and to a father, Emmanuel, whom some writers have suggested was an Orthodox Jew – though such an intermarriage throws doubt on the father's orthodoxy.[32] When he was sixteen years old, Adolphus left Germany for the United States, spending several years in New Orleans where he was active in the Masonic Order but left no record of himself as a participant in that city's growing Jewish community. He ventured briefly to Tennessee, where he befriended Sam Houston, then in the mid-1820s moved to Nacogdoches, Texas, which was still an outpost on the Mexican frontier

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[29] M.K. Wisehart, *Sam Houston, American Giant* (Washington DC: Robert B. Luce, 1962): 109.
[30] Archie P. McDonald, "Introduction," in Adolphus Sterne, *Hurrah for Texas! The Diary of Adolphus Sterne, 1838-1851*, ed. Archie P. McDonald (Austin: Eakin Press, 1986): xii.
[31] Winegarten and Schechter, 9.
[32] Harriet Smither, "Diary of Adolphus Sterne," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 30 (October 1926): 139-40n.1; McDonald, ix.

and a popular stopping point on the overland route between Mexican Texas and the United States. Sterne opened a trading business in Nacogdoches, the perfect spot for this "adventurous, rollicking young fellow, full of fun, and delighting in the dangerous life which then prevailed in this state."[33] There was virtually no Jewish population in Texas at the time, so in moving there from New Orleans Sterne left a place with an increasingly active community for one with almost none. This is clearly not the action of someone committed to Judaism in any traditional way.

In 1828, Sterne married Eva Catherine Rosine Ruff, a German-born Catholic who had come to America as a child and had grown up among Louisiana's planter class. The couple were leading citizens of Nacogdoches who maintained friendships with many of the most prominent figures in early Texas. Eva was a famously gracious hostess, who "entertained more distinguished guests in her home than any woman in Texas"; her regular guests included early Texas notables such as David Kaufman, Thomas Rusk, and Davy Crockett.[34] Adolphus rekindled his friendship with Sam Houston, who became a frequent guest at the Sternes' home.

Sometime between 1833 and 1835, for reasons either personal or political, Sam Houston chose to become a member of the Catholic Church. "It would be interesting to know," mused biographer Marquis James, "to what extent he was

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[33] "Sketches of the leading citizens of Eastern Texas," quoted by Henry Cohen, "Settlement of the Jews in Texas," 141.

[34] Gloria Frye, "Eva Catherine Rosine Ruff Sterne (1809-1897)," in *Women in Early Texas*, ed. Evelyn M. Carrington (Austin: Jenkins Publishing Co., 1975): 235.

swayed by expediency and to what extent by Eva Rosine Sterne."[35] Eva Sterne was a dedicated Roman Catholic. Whatever her involvement in Houston's decision, she recommended that her own confessor, Pére Chambondeau of Louisiana, perform the service, which occurred either in the Sternes' parlor or, according to some accounts, at the mission in Nacogdoches. Eva stood next to Houston throughout the ceremony, "standing sponsor as godmother."[36] Adolphus had not only married a daughter of the Catholic Church, but an especially devout and active one.

Sterne himself had officially converted to Roman Catholicism around the time of his marriage. Archie McDonald suggests that the legal realities in Mexican Texas forced Sterne to consider Catholicism, while Eva "succeeded in assisting Mexican law in converting him to that faith."[37] McDonald also claims, however, that Sterne, who "was more of a deist than anything else," remained conscious of Jewish religious obligations. On the unnamed authority of "one Jewish historian," McDonald claims that Sterne opted out of the ceremony marking Houston's conversion "because the baptism occurred on *Erev Yom Kippur*."[38] This explanation conflicts with Marquis James's report that following the service Adolphus "gave a party on the porch of his home and opened considerable wine": if Sterne was observing the holiday at all, he seems not to

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[35] James, 203.
[36] Amelia W. Williams and Eugene C. Barker, eds., *The Writings of Sam Houston, 1813-1863*, v. 1 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1938): 478n.3.
[37] McDonald, x.
[38] Ibid. Houston biographer M.K. Wisehart states that Adolphus and Eva did, in fact, serve together as Houston's godparents. Wisehart, 114.

have been fasting.[39] More to the point, McDonald's claim is undermined by the fact that no official records of the baptism exist, and historians have not been able to agree even on the *year* in which Sam Houston made his conversion, let alone the season or exact date. The claim that it occurred on Yom Kippur is a transparent attempt to strengthen Sterne's Jewish credentials. McDonald makes a similar, equally flawed attempt when he reports with no substantiation that Sterne spoke Yiddish.[40]

Despite these historiographical errors, it is too simple to attribute Sterne's categorization as a Jew solely to a wish among contemporary scholars to claim him as such. Sterne's own diary, in which he kept a meticulous accounting of his daily business activities, community contacts, and personal observations from 1840 to 1844 and again briefly in 1851, is a singular resource in the study of the Texas Republic. It provides ample evidence that Sterne was aware of Jewish holidays, had an interest in Jewish religious practice, and maintained close friendships with conspicuously Jewish fellow-citizens. He noted the occurrence of Yom Kippur, for example, in 1840 and 1843, though he made no mention of doing anything further to observe the holiday.[41] The diary reveals a deeper interest in Jewish ritual when, on July 15, 1841, Sterne reported having read "a Book . . . containing the Service of *Yom Kippur* in the Portuguese ritual," which had been given to him by a Mr. DeYoung of San Augustine, a neighboring

[39] James, 204.
[40] McDonald, xi.
[41] Sterne, 4, 175.

town.[42] Elsewhere in the diary, Sterne described DeYoung as "a German Jew of the *old reverend class*," and his wife as a "very much accomplished" woman who "deserves a better looking Husband."[43] In spite of the light dig at DeYoung, it was apparently a close friendship: Sterne frequently stayed with the DeYoungs when in San Augustine on business, and he and his wife hosted them in Nacogdoches on many occasions.

These examples suggest that Sterne, though not a practicing Jew himself, was familiar with Jewish tradition and expressed an abiding interest in it. In 1843, he took the additional step of criticizing DeYoung's Jewish business partner, Mr. Flatau, for his inadequate attention to his faith. "[T]o day is Yom Kippur," Sterne noted. "Mr Flatau is doing Penance, nonsense, to keep up a Religion only one day in the year."[44] The comment is deeply informative. The use of the distinctively Catholic term "Penance" suggests that Sterne was a Christian viewing Jewish behavior from the outside, but the remark also reveals that Sterne was conscious of the Jewish holiday and expected those of the Jewish faith to respect it appropriately. While remaining an outsider to the Jewish faith, Sterne was enough a part of it to take its practice personally and to note, even to condemn, the practices of others. Sterne later took a similar jab at Flatau when he learned in December of 1843 of plans to publish a newspaper, the San Augustine *Literary Intelligencer*: "Edited or *Fathered* by L.A.L Laird and *T.M. Flatau*, the

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[42] Sterne, 50. Sterne never clearly provides Mr. DeYoung's first name, though references to Michael Deyoung on July 5, 1841 and January 16, 1843 probably identify the same man. Sterne, 49, 137.
[43] Sterne, 62.
[44] Sterne, 175.

Paper is to be a *Methodist* Paper -- (oh! dear) -- & to be under the management of a *Son of Abraham* verily I am tempted to believe in Parson Miller's Doctrine [that the end of the world is imminent]."[45]

Sterne's deep personal interest in Judaism camouflages the fact that he was also active as a Christian. While Sterne never expressed in his diary a clear preference for any particular denomination, he recorded his activities with several Christian groups. In February of 1841, he described dining with a pair of priests with whom "an arrangement was made to build a Roman Catholic Church" in Nacogdoches, with Sterne and two other residents "appointed the Principal Committee."[46] On one Sunday in 1851 he recorded that he "went to church (catholic)," but that he found "nothing very new Stirring," and then several months later he "went to the Methodist Church where Mr Becton formerly of Nacogdochez County preached."[47] This pattern of events suggests that it was important to Sterne to attend religious worship but that he comfortably rotated among churches.

Sterne also frequently attended camp meetings held in the area, a clear sign that he was part of the frontier religious fluidity that camp meetings represented. Significantly, Sterne was critical of fellow citizens who treated the meetings more as social than religious events, and he regularly condemned their lack of genuine faith and respect for religious tradition. In July of 1842, for example, he reported that "all hands in Town [had] gone out to Preaching" and

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[45] Sterne, 186. I have corrected Sterne's "belive" to "believe."
[46] Sterne, 26.
[47] Sterne, 212, 247.

hoped that "they all got Religion for God Knows they have none."[48] The next year he attended another meeting where "Mr Becton preached, Mr Cawley exhorted, and a great many prayed." Sterne expressed confidence that their prayer would be heard "provided it is sincere" – but, he noted, "there is the rub." In addition to many believers whom he felt could "be put down upon the *doubtfull* list," Sterne expressed admiration for one participant, Captain Vail, whom Sterne praised as "not alone a very zealous Christian but a most Complete believer in Miller's Doctrine," a millennialist faith that was increasingly popular at that time.[49]

It is meaningful that Sterne reserves his praise for someone of clear, if unpopular, religious devotion: sincerity apparently mattered more to Sterne than the particular tenets of any one group. Thus he offered judgment in his diary of clergymen who spoke at these events, praising, for example, "a Mr Porter from Mississippi" who "is realy a Preacher of the Gospel of the very first Class." After Porter's sermon, Sterne reports, a listener "said a few foolish things about the Citizens of Nacogdochez not hearing or going to hear Preachers of the Gospel." Rising to his townspeople's defense, Sterne blamed the clergy for the lack of spiritual fervor. "[W]ell he may say Brayers of the Gospel," Sterne wrote. "[L]et the Presbitery send men like Porter, who can *teach* us, and *explain* to us about matters of *Christianity* we do not understand, and all will gladly embrace the

[48] Sterne, 103.
[49] Sterne, 177. I have corrected Sterne's "beliver" to "believer."

opportunity to go and hear, and perhaps to be convinced – but if *ignoramuses* are sent amongst us they will meet with the encouragement they deserve."[50]

In passages like these, Adolphus Sterne made it clear that he was not traditionally Jewish, but it is also too easy to regard him simply as a Christian and therefore beyond the pale of Texas Judaism. Judaism was obviously close to his heart and often in his mind – much more so, one must guess, than it was for the average Anglo settler in Texas. At the very least, Sterne was a man living at the confluence of several religious traditions, heir to a dual heritage by birth, living under conflicting political and religious requirements, greatly inspired by secular rationalist thought, and representative of the fluidity that personal identity often assumes in frontier environments. Mexican and Republican Texas did not offer Sterne, or anyone else, the freedom to be actively Jewish: no Jewish institutions existed, no Jewish clergy visited their communities, and no significant Jewish population was present to support such things. Texas was still a frontier, not a place for religious absolutism, and Adolphus Sterne's identity was suitably complex.

By the time Texas achieved statehood in 1846, no more than a few dozen individual Jewish adventurers had joined the growing American migration there. Those who chose to go had to know that their ties to Judaism would be difficult, if not impossible to maintain. When they went to Texas, they made a conscious choice to abandon those ties in order to pursue their hopes of personal success and adventure, or in order to be part of an expanding frontier: what Texas lacked in

[50] Sterne, 114.

spiritual facilities it more than made up for in financial opportunity. The experience of Sam Maas is illuminating in this regard. Maas was born in Germany in 1810, emigrated to Pittsburgh and then to South Carolina in the early 1830s, and then lit out for Texas. According to his 1897 obituary in the *Galveston Daily News*, Maas "took a schooner loaded with lumber, with which to build a house, and sailed for Galveston," but "[t]he schooner was wrecked on one of the Florida keys." Maas "escaped and by nothing dauntless, came on to Texas as best he could and arrived in Nacogdoches County in 1836, just after the Battle of San Jacinto."[51] He lived briefly in Nacogdoches, where he was an acquaintance of Adolphus Sterne,[52] then moved on to Houston and Galveston where, like so many other Jewish immigrants to Republican Texas, he operated a series of mercantile establishments.

Maas self-consciously expressed his wish to improve his personal fortunes in Texas. While aboard the schooner that would eventually wreck him in the Florida Keys, Maas wrote letters to Caroline Hart, apparently his fiancée back in Charleston, in which he fondly described high hopes for Texas and his expectation to earn enough to secure a future for himself and Caroline. "To You, I look forward amidst dangers and difficulties that may obstruct my path," he wrote. "[T]he pains shall be light to me, when I consider that they will ease, and I will return to You again; and a life of unimpaired joy with You." On board, Maas met several other travelers bound for Texas and reported to Caroline their "good spirits and buoyant hopes for meeting success in Texas." One traveling

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[51] "Death of a Pioneer," *Galveston Daily News* (11 January 1897).
[52] Sterne mentions Maas once in his diary, on November 2, 1840. Sterne, 10.

companion passed on a report to Maas that Texas was "one of the finest conditions on the globe." Maas claimed that his "own fortunes are certainly connected with the general advancement of theirs, and I must contribute my part to the great work of rapid improvement." He saw in Texas "a field of speculation open, that is scarcely presented in any such ratio elsewhere, rare fortunes must be made in Texas, of an astounding magnitude." Maas perceived that his future awaited in Texas, insisting to his fiancée that "my stake must count for something worth counting before my youth my spirit, or strength have lost in their energy of action."[53] Such language displays the hopefulness with which immigrants like Maas arrived in the young Republic.

Two things are missing, though, from Maas's shipboard correspondence that reveal flaws in the future he was hoping to build for himself. First, his promise to Caroline to return to Charleston and "a life of unimpaired joy" was ultimately impossible to reconcile with his apparent wish to remain in Texas: she never, in fact, followed him there, and the couple never married. Second, Maas made no reference to the hardships of living a Jewish life in Texas and revealed no interest in doing so. If that was a priority, it only surfaced later when, in 1844 after several successful years in Texas, he returned to Germany for a visit and became enamored of a rabbi's daughter in Cologne named Isabella Offenbach. According to Maas's obituary in the *Galveston Daily News*, Isabella was renowned as a singer, "[t]alented and beautiful," and "she was courted by dukes and barons, and members of the nobility." Though "the young man without a title

[53] Sam Maas to Caroline Hart, [June 1836], AJA Correspondence Files.

stood little show," Sam persisted and eventually persuaded Isabella to join him in Galveston, where she spent her long life as an active member of the city's Hebrew Ladies Association and Temple B'nai Israel.[54]

For Sam Maas, Texas offered no limit to financial advancement but, like many other Jewish men on the American frontier, when he wanted to marry a Jewish woman he had to find her elsewhere. The scant, scattered, largely male population of frontier Texas offered little sense of community or of religious and ethnic unity. In this, Texas was characteristic of the entire American Western frontier: the first Jews to arrive in any particular place were young men, adventurers seeking fortune and economic opportunity, and they existed in a society that was virtually without religious community. As the population increased, however, and as frontier territories joined the political structure of the United States, more Jews arrived, especially women. These new arrivals helped to provide the critical mass necessary to begin forming Jewish groups and institutions, and they permitted the establishment of families and the arrival of Jewish children. Like Isabella Maas, Jewish women would become deeply involved in converting the deprivations of the frontier into lasting religious communities.

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[54] "Death of a Pioneer," *Galveston Daily News* (11 January 1897); see also Winegarten and Schechter, 72.

Chapter 2. A "Wild Indian Region": Jews and Other Frontier Texans

Isaac Leeser of Philadelphia, one of the antebellum period's most vocal and influential rabbis, saw the future of world Jewry in America's expanding Western frontier, "where the climate is mild, and the soil new and fruitful, capable of making ample returns for the labours of the husbandman."[1] He was especially gratified that his monthly newspaper, the *Occident*, boasted subscribers throughout the nation's hinterland who found in the paper a connection to a vast national network of Jewish communities. "Our work goes to fully an hundred small places, where we have a single subscriber in each," he marveled. "It may be that each of these readers is the only Israelite in the place, or that there are one or two others near him." Leeser worried that these "solitary sojourners" would face religious persecution in the strange lands they inhabited and would perhaps feel compelled, due to the lack of familiar religious institutions, to cling to some other faith. As an example, he offered "the immense State of Texas," where "although many Jews live scattered here and there, there is but one incipient congregation," in Houston. As in other states with low Jewish populations, Texas Jews "are often lost among the masses, because they are without religious instruction."[2] Leeser here expressed a common ambivalence among American Jews: frontier regions like Texas offered both opportunity and risk, both the

[1] Isaac Leeser, "The Prospect," *Occident* 4 (September 1846): 271.
[2] [Isaac Leeser], "The Importance of Missions," *Occident* 11 (May 1853): 85-86.

chance to advance oneself economically and the potential to be lost to Judaism forever.

Letters Leeser had received from some of the "solitary sojourners" in Texas may have brought the state to mind. Three years before, in 1850, he had accepted a subscription from E. Wolff of Eagle Pass, a small village on the Mexican border. Wolff described himself as "a constant reader" of the *Occident* during his residence in America and told Leeser that he would be at a loss without it during his present stay "in this Wild Indian region." Wolff arranged through a complicated chain of agents to have ten dollars sent to Leeser in Philadelphia, in exchange for which he wanted a subscription to the *Occident* along with back issues and "any Jewish tracts that may have appeared."[3] More recently, Leeser had received a similar letter from Isaac Jalonick of Belton, Texas. "It will surprise you Sir to hear from such remoot part on the frontier of Texas," Jalonick wrote in his conspicuously inaccurate English. Jalonick asked Leeser to send him a subscription to the paper as well as some bibles and prayer books, but he explained that he could not pay for them right away. "I would like to send you the pay in advance," he wrote, "but hear we cane not obtain payper muny when we Please, & I Live a long wais from the coust [coast]. As soon as I cane obtain paiper muny I will rimit it to you."[4]

Signing himself "a True Jew & a frend to our cous [cause]," Jalonick presented himself as a man dedicated to his faith but whose livelihood had taken him to a place where its practice was exceedingly complicated. Significantly,

[3] E. Wolff to Isaac Leeser (31 December 1850), Leeser Papers, AJA Manuscript Collection 197.
[4] Isaac Jalonick to Isaac Leeser (28 May 1853), AJA Manuscript Collection 197.

neither Wolff nor Jalonick expressed regret at their isolation in Texas: on the contrary, by reaching out to Leeser and his newspaper, they were attempting to reconcile their faith with the realities of the "Wild Indian region" they inhabited. Jalonick even described his sojourn to Texas in prophetic terms, as part of the necessary dispersal of the Jewish people around the globe: "[I]t is as it shuld be," he wrote, "the prophicing most be full fild."[5] He was not alone in seeing it this way. Twenty years later a correspondent in Denison, north of Dallas, wrote to the *American Israelite* to express a similar view. "'A voice crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way,'" the writer quoted. "Yes, indeed, in the wilderness, in the full sense of the word, are we preparing the way of Judaism, and through it, to civilization and universal brotherhood."[6] These writers were aware of the hardships they were suffering as Jews in isolated places, but they chose to interpret their condition not only as good but as biblically sanctioned. Perhaps in truth, or perhaps only as a massive rationalization, they chose to see themselves as bearers of Jewish civilization into a new world: "at the very borders of civilization, on the frontier of Texas," wrote the Denison correspondent, "we celebrated [Yom Kippur], and verily, you with your temples and organs and preacher could not have been more devout and sincere than we were, in our little frame-house, destitute of all furniture and ornaments save a few dozen chairs and a dry-good box improvised as a desk."[7]

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[5] Ibid.
[6] *American Israelite* (17 October 1873).
[7] Ibid.

In fact, Wolff, Jalonick and others were at the vanguard of a growing number of Jews who went to Texas seeking the commercial opportunities available in an expanding frontier. Recognizing that doing so necessarily distanced them from their religion, they looked for ways to reconnect themselves with Jewish tradition and to justify their presence in Texas in terms less crass than pure commercialism. Unlike Adolphus Sterne and other Jewish pioneers in Texas, whose Jewish identity was marginal at best, this new generation was committed to their faith and wanted to sustain it amid the hardships of the frontier. Antebellum Texas Jews established the rudiments of Jewish religious and communal life under isolated conditions that made assimilation a much easier option than cultural continuity. As they did so, they also blended easily into the white majority population of Texas, taking full advantage of the social opportunities their whiteness afforded them while contrasting themselves with the state's racial minorities. As Texas Jewry grew increasingly diverse and complex in later generations, these first organized communities set the tone for what was to come.

With the annexation of Texas into the United States in 1846, travel there for Americans and Europeans became easier than ever, and Jews began to congregate in the large cities in sufficient numbers to start building necessary and lasting religious institutions. Galveston and Houston, separated by about fifty miles, were the earliest centers of organized Jewish life in the state. Together, the two formed "a functional pair, the one the tidewater focus and the other the ocean port, linked across the waters of Galveston Bay, binding much of East and Central

Texas to the commerce and culture of America and Europe."[8] While Galveston developed into something like a miniature New Orleans, a port city of mingling cultures and international influence, Houston took over the business end of the partnership, providing the trading center and distribution point for goods arriving at its sister city. Houston looked toward the Texas interior, the rural expanses of a growing state, as Galveston cultivated a more sophisticated international flavor, drawing regular trade and steamer service from New Orleans, New York, London, and by 1848 from Bremen, Germany. Both Texas cities hosted a complex mixture of nationalities and ethnicities. "The populations of both displayed all the variety of their hinterlands and more," writes cultural geographer D.W. Meinig, "with New Englanders and New Yorkers, English and Scotch, French and Italians added to the Anglos and Negroes, Germans, Czechs, and Irish of the countryside." Meinig also notes the greater religious diversity in Houston and Galveston than in the rest of the state: "Here Episcopalians and Lutherans, Catholics and Jews together overshadowed the Methodists and Baptists, who were so dominant over so large a part of the interior."[9] Of the thirteen established Roman Catholic churches counted in Texas by the U.S. Census in 1850, for example, about ten were in the Diocese of Houston-Galveston.[10]

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[8] D.W. Meinig, *Imperial Texas: An Interpretive Essay In Cultural Geography* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969): 57.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Mike Kingston, "Religion in Early Texas," *Texas Almanac* <http://www.texasalmanac.com/texasreligion.shtml>[Accessed 13 December 2002]; "Galveston-Houston, Catholic Diocese Of," *The Handbook of Texas Online* <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/GG/icg1.html> [Accessed 13 December 2002].

Houston was a new city at the birth of the Texas Republic and a popular destination for immigrants with mercantile hopes. It grew quickly in its first few years: from its establishment in 1836, it claimed about 2,000 inhabitants by 1850 and about 10,000 by the end of the Civil War. With the expanding population came a bustling business climate and great opportunities for peddlers and retail merchants, positions that an influx of Jewish entrepreneurs quickly filled. At least one Jewish merchant, Eugene Chimene, who had fought at the battle of San Jacinto, was in Houston at the city's founding, and another, Henry Wiener, arrived almost immediately afterward. Michael Seeligson opened a store in about 1839 near the young city's steamboat landing and operated it for a few years before transferring to Galveston and eventually becoming that city's mayor. Isaac Coleman settled in Houston in the early 1840s after peddling goods around the countryside. Jacob de Cordova, a Jamaican-born Sephardic Jew who made his career in land speculation, lived in Houston from 1839 to 1842. By 1850, possibly seventeen Jewish adults (eleven men and six women) were included in Houston's total white population of 1,863.[11]

As is typical of frontier communities, the population of Houston, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, was mobile: like Seeligson and de Cordova, many worked for a while in the city before moving on to other parts of the region. Lewis A. Levy was probably the first Jewish settler to remain permanently in the city. Unlike earlier Texas pioneers, there is no question that Levy practiced Judaism actively. Born in Amsterdam in 1799 to a family with Portuguese origins, Levy

[11] Elaine Maas, "Jews," in *The Ethnic Groups of Houston*, ed. Fred R. von der Mehden (Houston: Rice University Press, 1984): 141.

emigrated with his family to London where he married a cousin, Mary A. Levy, in 1817. In 1818, their growing family left for the United States, settling in Richmond, Virginia, where they were members of a Sephardic congregation, Beth Shalome. Levy moved his wife and young child to New Orleans in 1831 and then, after neighboring Texas had achieved its independence, to Galveston in 1838 and to Houston in 1840. He purchased about fifteen acres of land from Sam Houston and opened shop as a merchant and dealer in land certificates. He and his wife ultimately had twenty children, including their daughter Hannah, whose 1847 marriage to Henry Wiener was probably the first Jewish wedding performed in Texas and one of the first between two permanent residents of Houston.[12]

According to Jacob de Cordova, Lewis A. Levy was responsible for organizing Houston's Jewish benevolent society, which had "also under its control a burial-ground."[13] In 1854, Levy had organized a collection for New Orleans yellow fever victims, and that project led to the formal establishment of the Hebrew Benevolent Society in 1855, with Levy as its first chairman.[14] He was also instrumental in the formation of the state's first Jewish congregation, Houston's Hebrew Congregation Beth Israel, in 1859, and was one of its first

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[12] I have compiled information on Lewis Levy from papers collected in TJHS Box 3A165, Folder 7 and Box 3A166, Folder 1. Some additional information about Levy and his family is available in a long article about his brother, Moses Albert Levy, who served as Surgeon General of the Texas Republican Army. Daniel N. Leeson, "In Search of the History of the Texas Patriot Moses A. Levy, Part I," *Western States Jewish History* 21 (July 1989): 291-306, and "Part II," *Western States Jewish History* 22 (October 1989): 22-37.

[13] Jacob de Cordova, *Texas: Her Resources and Her Public Men* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1858): 64.

[14] Ruthe Winegarten and Cathy Schechter, *Deep in the Heart* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1990): 21; additional materials in Irving L. Samuels, packet of materials related to Lewis A. Levy (5 February 1991), TJHS Box 3A166, Folder 1.

members.[15] When he died in 1861, he was "acknowledged as the leader of the young Houston Jewish community."[16] A pioneer in a newly settled territory and a diligent follower of his faith, Levy was among the first Jewish Texans to live fully as both.

The organization of Galveston's Jewish community followed a pattern similar to Houston's. A handful of Jewish merchants, including, briefly, Jacob de Cordova, opened shops there beginning in the late 1830s. By 1850, there were four Jewish families in Galveston, twelve adults and fourteen children.[17] As Lewis A. Levy had been the driving force in Houston, the Dyer family had the

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[15] There is some dispute about the founding dates of the first Jewish communal organizations in Houston. Rabbi Henry Cohen gives 1844 as the date the cemetery was established and 1854 as the date of the foundation of Congregation Beth Israel. Rabbi Henry Barnston confirms the 1854 establishment of Beth Israel and records that by 1859 it had 22 members. Cohen's daughter-in-law, Anne Nathan Cohen, in the official history of the congregation itself, cites Cohen and Barnston but is doubtful about the accuracy of these "secondary sources." Decades later, Elaine Maas accepted these dates, although in her earlier dissertation she had restated Helena Schlam's conclusion that the cemetery was more likely created in 1854 and the congregation in 1859. Ruthe Winegarten and Cathy Schechter have apparently also relied on Schlam's corrected dates. Henry Cohen, "Settlement of the Jews in Texas," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 2 (1894): 152; Henry Barnston, "The History of the Jews of Houston," AJA Small Collection 5244; Anne Nathan Cohen, *The Centenary History – Congregation Beth Israel of Houston, Texas, 1854-1954* (Houston, 1954): 1; Maas, "Jews," 141; Elaine Maas, *The Jews of Houston: an Ethnographic Study* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Rice University, 1973): 30; Helena Frenkil Schlam, "The Early Jews of Houston" (Master's Thesis, Ohio State University, 1971): 38-46; Winegarten and Schechter, 21.

Cohen and his followers were in error in first dating the origins of these institutions, and Schlam's revised dates are correct. The later dates – 1854 for the cemetery and 1859 for the congregation – correspond to coverage of these events in the national Jewish press. In 1852, the *Occident* reported the dedication of a Jewish cemetery in Galveston as if it were the first such event in the state. *Die Deborah* recognized the establishment of the Beth Israel Congregation in September of 1859, two months before the congregation ran an advertisement in the *American Israelite* for a rabbi. The *Occident* also reprinted a letter from Houston in September of 1859 describing the opening of the "Pioneer Congregation of Texas." "Ceremonial at Galveston," *Occident* 10 (29 Aug 1852): 379-84; *Die Deborah* 5 (16 September 1859): 43; *American Israelite* (18 November 1859): 159; M.R. to the Editor, *Occident* 17 (8 September 1859): 144. This and other references to *Die Deborah* come from the AJA cardfile index, in English, of that German-language periodical.

[16] Samuels, packet of materials related to Lewis A. Levy, TJHS Box 3A166, Folder 1.

[17] Winegarten and Schechter, 18.

greatest influence on the incipient Jewish community in Galveston. Siblings born in Dessau, Germany, between 1807 and 1815, Leon, Rosanna and Isadore Dyer emigrated to Baltimore with their parents sometime in the late 1810s, and the family soon split up, following business opportunities in other parts of the country. Leon, the oldest, was the first to arrive in Texas, leaving his branch of the family business in New Orleans to participate in the Texas Revolution. Rosanna married a Dutch-born merchant and jeweler, Joseph Osterman, who was a charter member of the Baltimore Hebrew Congregation. When Osterman suffered business setbacks, Leon, who had become impressed with Texas, sent word back to his brother-in-law to travel down and try his luck in Galveston. Leon provided some capital and collected a stock of goods for Osterman to sell after he arrived, "general merchandise, which included everything: from horseshoes, to a coffin, to a bag of coffee."[18] Osterman made the move to Galveston in 1837 and opened a shop in a tent he set up in a vacant lot not far from the port, and Rosanna joined him the following year. The third Dyer sibling, Isadore, rejoined the family in Galveston in 1840 and started an insurance business. Between them, the Dyers and the Ostermans founded a powerful business family in Galveston.[19]

According to one source, the Dyers and Ostermans "were meticulously observant in traditional religious practice," but with few Jews in the city and no

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[18] J.O. Dyer, "Life of Early Galveston As Told by Storekeeper," *Galveston Daily News* (18 December 1921).

[19] I have gathered information on Dyers and Ostermans from Cohen, "Settlement of the Jews in Texas," 147-49; Winegarten and Schechter, 10, 18; Natalie Ornish, *Pioneer Jewish Texans* (Dallas: Texas Heritage Press, 1989): 171-73, 246-48; and from papers collected in TJHS Box 3A167, Folder 1.

organized communal life, that would have been very hard for them to maintain.[20] Isadore, in fact, married an Episcopalian woman in 1841, though she apparently agreed to help him raise their children as Jews. Together, the Dyers and Ostermans were primarily responsible for the first permanent Jewish institution in the state, the cemetery in Galveston. When Isadore's six-year-old son died, the family took the necessary steps to secure a Jewish burial. Joseph Osterman purchased a plot of land and donated it to the community, and his wife, Rosanna, arranged for Rabbi M.N. Nathan of the New Orleans Portuguese Hebrew Synagogue to travel to Galveston to perform a consecration ceremony. When the event was carried out in August of 1852, the *Galveston Daily News* described it as "the first [worship service] ever performed publicly by a Hebrew minister in Texas," and Isaac Leeser reported the event in the *Occident*, noting that Nathan's service "was listened to with great attention by the few of our faith in the city," as well as "a large number of Christian friends."[21]

Rabbi Nathan also recognized the small gathering as a milestone, "the first public assemblage in a quarter so remote from the birth-place and cradle of our religion," where Jews were meeting "to lay the foundation-stone, as it may be termed, of the edifice of Judaism." Nathan emphasized the community's isolation but asked them to look forward to a day when "large congregations of our brethren will abound in this gigantic State of the Union" and when future generations would "naturally be excited to ascertain who first unfurled and raised

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[20] "Trail Blazers of the Trans-Mississippi West," *American Jewish Archives* 8 (October 1956): 73-74.

[21] "Hebrew Burial Ground," *Galveston News* (31 August 1852); *Occident* 10 (October 1852): 366.

the standard of Judaism in this section of the West." To those who might doubt such a future, Nathan addressed a question: "Who, half a century ago, would have ventured to say, that on this verdant prairie, which once resounded with the war-whoop of the Indian, – which echoed back the footfall of the Mexican hunter's steed, – which rang with the boisterous mirth, the profane words of the ferocious and unprincipled buccaneers, the name of the Eternal God of Hosts would be invoked by Israelites, in the primitive tongue?"[22] Thus Nathan described his congregants, to themselves and to their Christian neighbors, not as lost and isolated souls on a lonely frontier but as the vanguard of Jewish advancement, even of civilization itself, and he urged them to push fervently into that future.

Nathan was not blind, however, to the difficulties his listeners would face. They lacked spiritual leadership, he knew, and he noted that "[i]t may be long ere another Jewish minister may address you." He acknowledged their small number, "too few," he said, "to build a Synagogue, to form a congregation for public worship." Isadore was surely unhappy to hear Nathan tell them that they had been lax in seeking Jewish marriage partners and in "[stamping] your offspring with the seal of the covenant of circumcision," and the rabbi further chastised them for attending Christian worship services "to pray to a mediator, whom no instructed Israelite believes in, and listen to dogmas and doctrine to which you cannot subscribe." He reminded them of the religious options that were available to them even in their remote and outnumbered situation: they could pray at home, they could circumcise their sons, and, with "respectable and populous

[22] "Ceremonial at Galveston," *Occident* 10 (August 1852): 380-81.

congregations . . . in your immediate neighborhood," presumably Nathan's own congregation in New Orleans, they could seek "suitable alliances with Hebrew blood" for their children. These were things that they should not only strive to do, he added, but that "you are bound to do as Hebrews, Israelites, Jews."[23] Notably, Nathan did not condemn his small group of congregants for their decision to remove themselves from larger and better organized Jewish communities; rather, he challenged them in their isolated condition to rise to the occasion and promote a Jewish life and outlook. "In almost the same position as our progenitor Abraham occupied nearly 4000 years ago," he said, "do we, at this moment stand."[24] His listeners had an opportunity, he claimed, to be the agents not only of Jewish survival but of the growth and development of Judaism itself, and their very remoteness made such a hope possible.

It is possible to interpret Nathan's statement in two ways, each of which can tell us a great deal about how these early Texas Jews understood their frontier condition. On the one hand, we can take him at his word, reading into his comments only the meanings he clearly stated. In this sense, the Galveston Jews who gathered to consecrate their cemetery were pioneers pushing against the limits of civilization in order to advance not only their own fortunes but the future of Jewry as well. By building Jewish institutions and following Jewish practices in "a quarter so remote from the birth-place and cradle of our religion," they were actually *serving* their faith, not carrying it heedlessly into the wilderness to be destroyed. In Nathan's view their movement west had purposefulness and a kind

[23] Ibid., 382-83.
[24] Ibid., 381.

of religiously sanctioned missionary zeal: if Galveston's Jews were not seeking to convert their Christian brothers, they were at least preparing the way for future generations of Jews to swell their numbers across the globe.

It is also possible, however, to hear in Nathan's comments more than a hint of rationalization. Galveston's Jews, after all, were not missionaries, nor had they ventured to Texas for the cause of religious freedom; Texas simply did not represent to them what, for instance, Utah represented to the Mormons. If anything, conditions in Texas ran directly counter to the purposes of religious survival and continuity that Nathan extolled. If it were really important to the Ostermans and Dyers to remain "meticulously observant in traditional religious practice," they would never have left Germany, or at least would have remained in well-established American cities. Texas provided economic opportunity available only at some cost to their religious devotion and, one assumes, with a certain amount of guilt. Thus Nathan intended his message, in part, to ease the consciences of Texas Jews who, isolated among gentiles yet steadily pursuing financial prosperity, could not help but feel that they had sold their birthright. Nathan's words reshaped the Jewish presence in Texas into an expression of Jewish identity, not a denial of it, and thus let Galveston's Jews off the hook even while exhorting them to greater devotion.

In whatever ways they could, many of the Texas Jews present, and possibly many others who read Nathan's address in the *Occident*, took his message to heart, perhaps hoping that by maintaining whatever forms of traditional Judaism were possible they could continually justify their presence in

Texas as something more than commercial opportunism. Instances abound of Texas Jews making efforts under trying circumstances to preserve religious traditions A few months after the cemetery dedication at which Nathan had compared Galveston's Jews to "our progenitor Abraham," for example, Michael Seeligson wrote to the *Occident* about a member of the community who, in the absence of a *mohel*, determined to perform his infant son's circumcision himself. "People endeavored to persuade him to wait till the child could be taken thither, or a Mohel be sent for," he wrote. "But he replied, that our Father Abraham performed this duty on the eighth day, why should he not do it also?"[25] The *Occident* later reported on a Houston couple who, when they could not afford to bring a *mohel* to town, resolved to wait to circumcise their son until one was available. The ceremony was finally performed *eight years* later, with "such solemnity and with such composure on the part of the boy," the *Occident* reported, "that it made a deep impression on all the by-standers" – though, one imagines, not nearly the impression it made on the boy himself.[26]

Not all efforts to follow Rabbi Nathan's recommendations took such extreme form. By 1856, the Galveston community was meeting regularly at the home of Isadore Dyer for prayer services in what Henry Cohen later identified as "a special room dedicated to that purpose."[27] And on Yom Kippur of 1859, the *Galveston News* took notice of the holiday and reported that "our Jewish fellow citizens have closed their places of business to celebrate it as a day of fast and

[25] *Occident* 10 (April 1852): 58-59.
[26] *Occident* 18 (19 April 1860): 24.
[27] Henry Cohen, "Settlement of the Jews in Texas," 147.

prayer."[28] Galveston's Jews clearly did much to keep the spirit, if not always the letter, of their faith alive.

Similar sentiments prevailed in Houston, whose Jewish community took the lead in organizing a congregation and building a synagogue. By 1859, the city's newly formed Congregation Beth Israel was sufficiently underway to advertise in the *American Israelite* for a religious leader. "The Hebrew Congregation Beth Israel, (House of Israel) is desirous of engaging a gentleman who is capable to act as Chazan, Schocket, Mohel and Bangal Koray," the ad stated. The salary was a fixed $1,000 a year, "besides perquisites, which, if he be a Mohel, will reach a considerable amount, as there is no Mohel in the country."[29] Houston Jews had organized their congregation under Orthodox precepts, and this advertisement illustrated their desire to worship in traditional ways. Their request for a *chazan* (trained, though unprofessional, spiritual leader), *schochet* (kosher slaughterer), *mohel* (circumcisor), and "bangal koray" (*ba'al korey*, a Torah reader) showed their effort to furnish themselves with the basic services necessary for traditional Jewish life.[30] The advertisement's sponsors also demonstrated, in their specific request for a *mohel*, that their community was growing – or had plans to grow – and needed to be prepared to welcome new members into Judaism in the appropriate way.

Within a year, Beth Israel employed the state's first full-time rabbi, Zachariah Emmich, who presided at regular Orthodox worship services. In March

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[28] *Galveston Daily News* (8 October 1859).
[29] *American Israelite* (18 November 1859): 159.
[30] I am grateful to Professor Seth Wolitz of the University of Texas at Austin for clarifying the meaning of "Bangal Koray."

of 1860 the *Occident* reported that Houston Jews had erected a wooden building in the downtown area as a house of worship, "the front of which is used as a Synagogue, the back portion as a meeting room," and which they had "handsomely fit up."[31] The Houston Jewish community, even at this very early stage, was clearly dedicated to living as full a Jewish life as they could in their remote location; as in their sister city of Galveston, they were literally building up what Rabbi Nathan had termed "the edifice of Judaism."

As Jews in Galveston and Houston built Jewish institutions, smaller Jewish communities began to appear throughout the state. In 1852, Michael Seeligson reported to the *Occident* that "[t]here are not many Jews in the state," but that "you will find a sprinkling of them in every village."[32] San Antonio Jews consecrated a cemetery in 1854 and began holding services under the auspices of a Hebrew Benevolent Society in 1856. The *American Israelite* reported in May of that year that the city held about fifty Jews, "most of them flourishing merchants." They had "organized themselves into a congregation, purchased a lot of ground for a burial place, and will at an early date furnish a room for a temporary Synagogue."[33] Meanwhile Jews were also making homes in the developing trading towns of rural East Texas. In 1850, they may have represented as much as 8% of the population of Jefferson, while a steady stream of Jewish migrants made their way directly from Syracuse, New York, to Marshall, Texas.[34] Joseph Landa,

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[31] *Occident* 17 (15 March 1860): 306.

[32] M. Seeligson to Isaac Leeser (November 1851), AJA Manuscript Collection 197, reprinted in *Occident* 10 (April 1852): 58-59.

[33] *American Israelite* (23 May 1856): 374.

[34] Carol Tefteller, "The Jewish Community in Frontier Jefferson," *Texas Historian: Publication of the Junior Historians of Texas* 35 (September 1974): 5, TJHS Box 3A172, Folder 4; Susanne Parker, "Shema Israel: The Reform Jewish Movement in Marshall," TJHS Box 3A172, Folder 6;

who had peddled his way down from New York to San Antonio, decided in 1847 to try his luck in the German enclave of New Braunfels, where he and his wife Helena raised the only Jewish family in the area. Helena prepared her own matzoh every year for Passover by mixing flour and water, rolling it out, cutting out the squares with a tin form, then rolling spurs with large rowels across the dough to make air holes.[35] In 1854, Samuel Schutz arrived in El Paso, at the state's farthest western reaches, where he would become a leading retailer and a founder of that city's Temple Mount Sinai.[36] And in 1860, the Jews of Victoria, not far from Houston, held "Minyan services" in honor of the High Holidays.[37]

The Civil War put a brief halt to immigration into Texas, but it continued faster than ever in the decades after the war; between 1860 and 1900 the state's population increased fivefold, from about 604,000 to just over 3,000,000.[38] By 1860, Houston had emerged as the state's premier rail center, and other railroads soon made Texas a national crossroads for several transcontinental lines. Rail companies built major connections throughout East Texas and connected the cities of Dallas, Fort Worth, Waco, San Antonio, and Houston to traffic throughout the nation. Other lines traversed West Texas through El Paso, linking the United States and Mexico through that city as well as through Laredo and Eagle Pass. Thus Texas became both a pathway to Mexico and the West, as well

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Audrey Daniels Kariel, "The Jewish Story and Memories of Marshall, Texas," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly* 14 (April 1982): 197.

[35] Harry Landa, *As I Remember* (San Antonio: Carleton, 1945): 14, 26.

[36] Floyd S. Fierman, "Insights and Hindsights of Some El Paso Jewish Families," *The El Paso Jewish Historical Review* 1 (Spring 1983): 225-28.

[37] *Die Deborah*, 6 (12 Oct 1860): 59.

[38] U.S. Census as reported in "United States Historical Census Data Browser" <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/census> [Accessed 20 December 2002].

as a destination for Americans seeking opportunity in its growing communities. Dallas, a village on the largely unnavigable Trinity River, boomed as the rail juncture of northern Texas, growing from 3,000 inhabitants in 1870 to 10,000 in 1880 and over 40,000 by 1900.[39] Other towns throughout Texas grew into cities because of the commerce and immigration provided by the railroads.

This influx of new settlers brought many more Jews than had ever arrived previously, and the relative ease of travel through the state dispersed them well beyond the traditional coastal centers. Most of the newcomers were merchants following rail lines to the state's newest centers of commercial activity – and occasionally making centers of commercial activity where none had existed before. Isaac Sanger and his four younger brothers, for example, began arriving in Texas in 1857 and opened retail and clothing stores throughout the state. After the success of their first stores in the railroad towns of McKinney, Decatur and Weatherford, they began following the construction of the Houston and Texas Central Railroad, establishing stores in Millican in 1865; in Bryan in 1867; in Calvert in 1869; in Kosse, Groesbeck, and Corsicana in 1871; and finally in Dallas in 1872 where their department store would grow into one of the premier retailing establishments in a famously retailing city.[40]

As Jews arrived in greater numbers, they supported the development of new Jewish associations, congregations, and schools. Galveston established the B'nai Israel congregation in 1868, followed by Temple Sinai in Jefferson in 1873;

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[39] Meinig, 75.

[40] Richard Denny Parker, *Historical Recollections Of Robertson County, Texas* (Salado: The Anson Jones Press, 1955): 195.

San Antonio's Beth El in 1874; Emanu El in Dallas in 1875; Austin's Beth Israel in 1876; and Waco's Rodef Shalom in 1879. By 1880 the state's Jewish population had climbed to about 3,300, enough to sustain thriving Jewish communities and facilities in a number of towns: one survey that year counted seven active congregations in the state, thirteen benevolent societies or cemetery organizations, and measurable Jewish populations in thirty-three cities and towns across the state.[41] By 1900, congregations had been formed in Brenham, Fort Worth, Brownsville, and El Paso.

As congregations developed in Texas cities, they attracted the state's first full-time pulpit rabbis. These were "largely free-lancers," however, "wandering scholars, jobless emigrés, even impostors who lacked religious credentials" according to Hollace Ava Weiner, whose book *Jewish Stars in Texas* is a thorough examination of Texas rabbis and their careers.[42] Zachariah Emmich, the state's first full-time professional rabbi, answered the call to Houston's Beth Israel in 1860 and was followed rapidly in that post by a string of others before Jacob Voorsanger arrived in 1878 and stayed for eight years.[43] Galveston's first rabbi with formal credentials was Abraham Blum, who took the post at B'nai Israel in 1871. In 1875, Temple Emanu El in Dallas hired Rabbi Aaron Suhler, who held the post for four years before moving to lead the congregation in Jefferson; he was succeeded in Dallas by H.M. Bien.

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[41] Union of American Hebrew Congregations, *Statistics of the Jews of the United States* (Cincinnati: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1880): 29-30.
[42] Hollace Ava Weiner, *Jewish Stars in Texas: Rabbis and Their Work* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1999): 7.
[43] As Weiner has shown, there was also some dispute over Emmich's credentials. Weiner, 235n.1.

In addition to serving their own congregations, these first rabbis were impelled to travel throughout the state to provide religious leadership to Jewish communities in more remote locations who could not afford full-time rabbis. Rabbinical "circuit-preaching" had long been discussed in national Jewish circles and in the Jewish press, and it was a topic of much concern and debate among national Reform leaders at the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and at the Hebrew Union College. When Isaac Wise, the head of these organizations, was slow to warm to the idea, correspondents in frontier communities became more assertive. Circuit preaching was an "all absorbing topic that agitates our small congregations," a writer in Calvert, Texas, told the *Jewish South*. If left to the HUC, however, "we surely will not have any." The reason, the writer explained, was that "the principle part of the delegates are from the large cities and have their ministers, schools, and societies, and while they are enjoying all of these advantages, they can show us a perfect feeling of indifference."[44] E.M. Browne, the editor of the *Jewish South*, took up the complaint, remarking that the Union's leaders "do not know what it means to live in a place without a temple or Jewish society at all. Those men do not know the yearning of the Israelite in a lonely village to hear, now and then, a minister of his own in explanation of the doctrines of Judaism."[45] The needs of Jews on the frontier, that is, were different from those in the centers, and programs were needed to help assure the survival of frontier Jewry.

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[44] Letter from "Harmony," *Jewish South* (5 September 1879).
[45] *Jewish South* (7 March 1879).

Because of the especially great distances between towns in Texas, which prevented rural people from traveling into the cities for religious activities, Texas rabbis were the first to take action on the matter of circuit preaching. Rabbi Jacob Voorsanger of Houston wrote in *The Jewish South* that there were many Jews in Texas and throughout the South who "would engage in the holy cause [of Judaism] if they would receive the proper encouragement." Voorsanger complained that "the U.A.H.C. is very slow in instituting circuit preaching, hence the friends of Israel must strike out unaided."[46] In 1879, Voorsanger, Blum and Bien met to create their own circuit-riding scheme, which they offered to Wise as a model for other parts of the country.[47] "After this," Voorsanger promised, "small communities who desire Sunday Schools or lectures can have no excuse."[48] Isaac Wise noted the achievement in the *Israelite* and delighted in reporting "one of the first instances of the rite of circumcision having been performed in Mexico," which occurred when Rabbi Blum "was summoned to undertake a journey of 500 miles – almost entirely in a traveling carriage – to circumcise a Jewish child at New Laredo."[49] Despite Wise's pleasure, however, it

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[46] *Jewish South* (5 December 1879).

[47] Cathy Schechter, "Shalom, Y'all," *Texas Highways* (August 1990): 52; Hollace Ava Weiner, "The Mixers: The Role of Rabbis Deep in the Heart of Texas," *American Jewish History* 85 (September 1997): 291-92; *Jewish South* (18 January 1878). Louis Schmier has written that the Texas plan "was a revolutionary one. It was not until the late 1880s that U.A.H.C. took up this issue. It was not until 1895 that the Committee on Circuit-Preaching successfully developed a circuit-preaching plan." Louis Schmier, "Introduction," in Charles Wessolowsky, *Reflections Of Southern Jewry: The Letters Of Charles Wessolowsky, 1878-1879*, ed. Louis Schmier (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1982): 81n.55. For a fuller history of the circuit riding movement and of the actions of the UAHC, see Steven Fox, "On the Road to Unity: The Union of American Hebrew Congregations and American Jewry, 1873-1903," *American Jewish Archives* 32 (November 1980): 145-93.

[48] *Jewish South* (5 December 1879).

[49] *American Israelite* (17 September 1880): 93.

took the UAHC more than fifteen years to adopt a national circuit-riding program on the Texas model.

Within the young Jewish communities these rabbis served, there was a striking diversity of religious views. The origins of Jewish immigrants to Texas reveal no discernible pattern – Eastern European as well as Central Europeans were present in these communities – nor in their consequent denominational character. Orthodoxy was well-represented in the state, and a few communities managed to put together the necessary facilities to preserve traditional practice. When Houston's Congregation Beth Israel was chartered in 1859, according to a report in the *Occident*, it followed "the Polish Minhag [prayer service], with some changes, which will not conflict with strict *orthodox principles*."[50] Significantly, Orthodoxy also thrived in smaller communities. Rabbi Chayim Schwarz, a trained Talmudist with a doctorate from the University of Berlin, made his way to Hempstead, Texas in 1873 to live among family. He continued his scholarly work, even taking a few students including Houston's Rabbi Jacob Voorsanger, and with his family established a small *shul* behind one of their homes. While making some concessions to American life – he eventually removed his yarmulke for all but religious occasions – Schwarz and his family maintained their Orthodox traditions.[51] In Brenham, Orthodox Jews established Congregation B'nai Abraham and built a synagogue. When it burned in 1893, they replaced it with a beautiful and remarkable building, small and white with a peaked roof, that

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[50] "M.R." to the Editor, *Occident* 17 (8 September 1859): 144.

[51] *American Israelite* (1 November 1900), reprinted as "From Kempen, Poland to Hempstead, Texas: the Career of Rabbi Heinrich Schwarz," *Western States Jewish History* 19 (January 1987): 132-33; Weiner, *Jewish Stars*, 3-20.

from the outside looked like a Baptist church. Inside, however, was a European-style synagogue with an octagonal *bimah* and upstairs women's gallery to facilitate Orthodox worship.

In many Texas communities, conflicts arose between Jews of Orthodox and Reform leanings. Whereas in large American and European cities subgroups of divergent ritualistic preferences could worship separately, Jews in the frontier communities of Texas, as in other young communities across the nation, could not afford separate facilities and so different denominations were forced together into shared institutions. Any given community was fortunate to be able to raise the means to sustain a single congregation; only the largest could sustain separate facilities for Orthodox and Reform practice, and conflicts regularly arose as congregants tried to strike a balance. The Hebrew Benevolent Society in Rockdale, which began as a cooperative effort between Orthodox and Reform groups, split over the question of whether or not to wrap a corpse in a white shroud before burying it in the town's Jewish cemetery.[52] In 1893, David Frosch moved his family from Galveston to Houston, in part to escape the constant antagonism between Galician and Lithuanian Jews in a city "where these geographic differences became almost a matter of life or death."[53]

If Frosch was able to find peace in Houston, it is only because that city had already undergone and finally resolved one of the Texas's most contentious disputes between adherents of Orthodox and Reform practice. Immediately

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[52] *Jewish South* (11 July 1879); *Jewish South* (1 August 1879).

[53] Daniel Frosch, "Unto the Seventh Generation: a narrative about the lives of David and Sarah Frosch, their forebears, relatives, and descendants," Section 2, p. 29, TJHS Box 3A164, Folder 8.

before the Civil War, the *Occident* had reported that Houston Jews were "in a prosperous pecuniary condition" and that several "keep the Sabbath and Festivals strictly, and do no business whatever on the sacred days."[54] The outbreak of the war, however, threatened that prosperous condition, and members of the congregation who leaned toward Reform Judaism saw an opportunity to recommend changes. In particular, they began to express their unwillingness to restrict their business activities on Jewish holidays and on the Saturday Sabbath, which most Houstonians considered a prime shopping day. Recognizing the challenge, Beth Israel's leadership issued a petition for its members to sign "concerning the imperative duties incumbent upon every Israelite, which unfortunately have been neglected in our midst namely, observing the Sabbath." The directors resolved to expel any congregants who refused to follow these guidelines, and accordingly they suspended five members, all prominent merchants, in November of 1861.[55] These initial expulsions, though a clear effort on the part of the leadership to enforce the requirements of their faith, were not followed by further action, and it is likely that the five merchants were soon reinstated.[56] Congregation Beth Israel was in a time of transition, trying to balance religious demands with the increasing difficulties of surviving a wartime economy. The more threatened the merchants' businesses became, the less willing they were to respect Jewish law.

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[54] *Occident* 17 (15 March 1860): 306.
[55] Beth Israel Minutes (19 October 19 1861), quoted in Schlam, 50.; Gary Alan Ratkin, "The Jews in Houston and Galveston, Texas during the Civil War" (May 1963): 15, TJHS Box 3A172, Folder 1.
[56] Ratkin, 15.

Conflicts within the congregation continued after the war. Many congregants felt strongly that they should continue relying on Orthodox ritual and on a traditional prayer book, the Polish *Minhag*. At the same time, many other members felt that the war had reinforced their identification with the American mainstream and that a more modern worship service was necessary to reflect that development. As Isaac Wise reported in his German-language newspaper *Die Deborah*, the members of the Houston synagogue were split between Poles, who favored the Polish prayer book, and Germans, who leaned toward Reform. "[O]utside of the synagogue," however, he wrote, "the Jews of Houston wish to be Americans." Wise reminded the congregation that they were neither Poles nor Germans but Americans who should accept the more modernized, assimilated style offered by Reform Judaism.[57] Several meetings of the congregation between 1867 and 1869 took up the issue of formally adopting Wise's *Minhag America*, a Reform prayer service: at one bizarre meeting in July of 1867, members voted to change to the Reform service, but their decision was overturned by another, smaller, meeting later in the day. In 1868, the congregation finally made the permanent decision to adopt the more modern services, and Beth Israel remains today the city's largest Reform congregation.[58]

Similar controversies and negotiations arose in communities throughout the state, with mixed results. In Calvert, for example, a plan to sponsor community-wide High Holiday services in 1879 fell apart when members failed to agree on how the services should be conducted. "Some of the members

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[57] *Die Deborah* 11 (27 April 1866): 171. Translation from AJA cardfile index.
[58] Anne Nathan Cohen, 9-11.

insisted upon having the old orthodox Machsar-service," a correspondent told the *Jewish South*, "and the balance, not to mar the harmony, acquiesced in that very unreasonable demand." The result, he says, was a disaster: no local leader was willing to officiate at "a mere farce," so the community paid an outsider, a "tramp, vulgo travelling Chasan" who "by his style and general conduct fully succeeded in disgusting everybody and in degrading and disgracing Judaism."[59] Other efforts were more successful. Worship services in Dallas had been conducted along Reform lines, alienating the city's Orthodox inhabitants who therefore, according to a correspondent in the *Jewish South*, "kept away from us, and on holidays had services of their own." Community leaders sought to reunify the two groups by drafting their own prayer service, the "*Minhag Dallas*," which blended the two forms of worship. [60] Though few congregations were as bold, compromises like this characterized the state's earliest Jewish communities and their effort to achieve balance among their diverse participants.

As Jews in Texas communities negotiated among themselves, they were also involved in frequent interactions with non-Jewish Texans. Even as the Jewish population grew, Jews remained a tiny minority within the state's overall population. By 1900, when Jews represented more than 1.25% of the American population, they numbered about 0.5% of the total population of Texas. In large cities like Houston, Galveston, Dallas and San Antonio, they rarely constituted more than 3% of the total population (See Table 1). And while they often chose

[59] *Jewish South* (26 December 1879).
[60] *Jewish South* (13 September 1878).

Table 1. Jewish and General Population of U.S., Texas, and Selected Cities, 1860-1900.

Location	Year	Population		Jews as % of Total
		Total	Jews	
United States	1860	31,443,321	200,000	.64
	1880	50,155,783	280,000	.56
	1900	75,994,575	1,058,135	1.39
Texas	1860	604,215	1,000	.17
	1880	1,591,749	3,300	.21
	1900	3,048,710	15,000	.49
Dallas (Dallas Co.)	1860	8,665	n/a	n/a
	1880	33,488	260	.78
	1900	82,726	1,200	1.45
Fort Worth (Tarrant Co.)	1860	6,020	n/a	n/a
	1880	24,657	100	.41
	1900	52,376	900	1.72
Galveston (Galveston Co.)	1860	8,229	n/a	n/a
	1880	24,121	1,000	4.15
	1900	44,116	1,000	2.27
Houston (Harris Co.)	1860	9,070	22	.24
	1880	27,985	461	1.65
	1900	63,786	2,500	3.92
San Antonio (Bexar Co.)	1860	14,454	n/a	n/a
	1880	30,470	302	.99
	1900	69,422	800	1.15

Sources: For U.S., Texas, and county general population: U.S. Census as reported in "United States Historical Census Data Browser" <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/census> [Accessed 20 December 2002]. For Jewish population: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, *Statistics of the Jews of the United States* (Philadelphia: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1880): 29-30; American Jewish Historical Society, *American Jewish Desk Reference* (New York: Random House, 1999): 35; Jacob Rader Marcus, *To Count a People: American Jewish Population Data, 1585-1984* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984): 211-17; *American Jewish Yearbook 1914-1915* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1915): 376. General populations in the U.S. Census are for counties; Jewish populations in the *American Jewish Yearbook* are for cities. Comparisons between the two are generally valid because Jewish Texans were predominantly urban, living inside city limits rather than in rural county areas.

to live close to one another, they never composed a majority of any Texas neighborhood.

Whereas in large Eastern cities, particularly New York, where Jews could live in areas with a full complement of religious institutions, providers of kosher foods, Yiddish-language newspapers and theaters, and Jewish clientele for their businesses, in Texas cities Jews were obliged to intermingle with other Texans, to live closely with them, and to rely on them as neighbors, customers, and friends. In the East Texas town of Marshall, for example, the choir of Moses Montefiore Congregation, Adath Israel, was largely composed of Christian vocalists who, according to one congregant, "sometimes mastered Hebrew better than the members of our congregation!"[61] A Dallas writer to the *Jewish South* reported in 1879 that, following the burning of the city's Methodist church, the members of Temple Emanu-El offered their synagogue for Methodist worship until the church could be rebuilt.[62] And Cathy Schechter reports that the Jews of Corsicana, "[a]ttesting to the religious tolerance of the predominantly Southern Baptist townspeople," held services in the City Hall and in space over the stores of gentile merchants until they could build a synagogue of their own.[63] The rise of Jewish communities in Texas occurred in the midst of a richly diverse gentile population, and even as Jews made efforts to build the distinctive religious structures they needed, their lives remained inseparable from those of the general population.Jews were clearly a minority in Texas, but determining exactly what

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[61] Audrey Daniels Kariel, "The Jewish Story and Memories of Marshall, Texas," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly* 14 (April 1982): 203.
[62] Lone Star to Editor, *Jewish South* (31 October 1879).
[63] Schechter, "Shalom, Y'all," 52.

the "majority" was is difficult. While Protestant Anglo-Saxons predominated in most Texas cities and towns, especially after statehood, Texas frontier communities were mélanges of ethnic, religious and cultural groups, and the diversity in any single community could be staggering. The cultural geographer D.W. Meinig reported that in the 1880s the town of Victoria, with a total population of fewer than 4,000, "was composed of Anglos, Germans, Negroes, Poles, French, and Mexicans (ranked by numbers); and in church populations of Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Jewish, Baptist, Methodist, and Christian."[64] Similar compositions were common in communities throughout the state. It is too simple, then, to describe frontier Texas as a place where Jews lived among Christians, or where they defined themselves as whites in opposition to black, Mexican, or Native American minorities. Jews were themselves one minority of several and were recognized as such, but they were also an accepted part of the majority white population. As their numbers grew and their economic status increased, they came into contact with the constellation of ethnic and religious groups that was characteristic of antebellum Texas. Their interactions with a diverse population reveal the fluidity of identity possible, even typical, in a frontier environment.

The most salient point about Jewish identity in frontier Texas is also the most important for Jewish identity and assimilation elsewhere in the United States: most American Jews were of European extraction and were white. Throughout their history in Texas, regardless of how they interacted with racial

[64] Meinig, 65.

and ethnic minorities, this fact provided the foundation of their intergroup relations. While their relationship with other whites was often strained, the general population never doubted that Jews were whites and that their primary social connections would be with others of that race. In fact, Texas Jews blended easily into the white majority and experienced very little open animosity.

Signs of the acceptability of Jews into the mainstream of white Texas were visible almost as soon as they had begun to appear in great enough numbers to be noticed. In 1853, the citizens of Galveston elected Michael Seeligson as their mayor. Seeligson had been born in Holland, lived for a while with his family in Philadelphia, and traveled to Houston in 1839. After running a store there briefly, he moved on to Galveston, where he was elected alderman in 1840 and 1848 before serving briefly as mayor. Seeligson made no secret of his Jewishness: he was a frequent correspondent of Isaac Leeser, often including language in Hebrew script in his letters.[65] There is little doubt that Seeligson had revealed himself as a Jew to his fellow Galvestonians. In a published letter to Leeser, in fact, he declared that his primary intention in running for mayor was to show that a Jew could achieve such an office. "I accepted the office," he wrote, "to thwart the Designs of a certain Clique who by the by were preaching publicly the Crusades against our Nation." Seeligson reveals, then, a certain degree of anti-Semitism in Galveston, but clearly not enough to prevent his election. "This is certainly an Evidence," Seeligson continued, "[that] if our people would only sustain their

[65] See, for example, M. Seeligson to Isaac Leeser (November 1851), AJA Manuscript Collection 197.

rights and privileges in this republican country, and Demean themselves accordingly, they can be elevated to any office they aspire."[66]

Seeligson and other Jews in Texas cities found a place among whites largely through commercial enterprise. If nothing else, the relative success of Jewish businesses is a testament to the willingness of other Texans to work with them. Samuel Schutz, for example, arrived in the frontier border town of El Paso in 1854, when the community was little more than a cluster of adobe buildings; his store there became one of the city's leading businesses. In the eastern part of the state, in Jefferson, Jewish merchants and other businessmen were especially visible. One of them, Israel Leavitt, operated a tavern that appears to have been the first Jewish-owned business in town. For a brief time in 1847, Leavitt's tavern served the general community as a temporary courthouse, sure evidence that Leavitt enjoyed the trust and respect of the townspeople of Jefferson.[67] In 1855, when Houston's Jews formed the state's first Hebrew Benevolent Association, the Houston *Telegraph* reported enthusiastically that these citizens "professing the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" had formed the organization to benefit members of their "church" who were suffering "pecuniary or physical distress." The editor claimed personal acquaintance with several of the organization's officers and knew them to be "among the most kind-hearted, humane, and high-minded business men of our city."[68] The comment suggests the

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[66] M. Seeligson to Isaac Leeser (19 June 1853), AJA Manuscript Collection 197, reprinted *Occident* 11 (June 1853): 188.
[67] Tefteller, 4.
[68] *Houston Telegraph* (7 March 1855), reprinted as "Houston, Texas, Hebrew Benevolent Association," *Occident* 13 (July 1855): 199-200.

depth of the business and social connections between Jews and non-Jews in Houston, as well as the degree to which gentiles in the city accepted Jews as fellow citizens.

Of all the areas in which Jews expressed their identification with other whites, however, none is as striking as the issue of slavery. Slavery had been legal in Texas since the territory's release from Mexican rule, both under the laws of the Republic and of the state. Even when Texas was controlled by Mexico, which outlawed slavery, American settlers in Texas often smuggled their slaves in with them and continued to work them illegally: Texas was a distant colony of a largely indifferent Mexican government. For those colonists who chose to obey the law, there were always loopholes. A visitor to Mexican Texas in 1834, for example, observed "a very intelligent man from Alabama" who, upon learning in transit to Texas that his slaves would be freed under Mexican law, "obtained their attested signatures to articles of indenture, by which they bound themselves to serve him for ninety-nine years."[69]

Slavery remained legal in the Republic of Texas, and many of the pioneers who migrated there after 1836 took their slaves with them. In 1836, the Republic's population numbered about 30,000 whites who owned among them some 5,000 slaves. By 1847, the white population had more than tripled to 100,000, with the slave population growing eightfold to 40,000.[70] By the time of the Civil War, there were about 182,000 African Americans held in slavery in

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[69] Anonymous, *Visit To Texas: Being the Journal of a Traveller Through Those Parts Most Interesting to American Settlers* (Readex Microprint, 1966 [1834]): 10.
[70] T. R. Fehrenbach, *Lone Star* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1968): 287.

Texas, constituting about a third of the state's population and representing a monetary value 20% greater than that of all cultivated lands in the state.[71] Although relatively few Texans actually owned slaves – only the planter class needed their labor, and not many planters could afford the costs of slave ownership – slaves contributed incalculably to the prosperity of the region.

Few Jewish Texans questioned the efficacy of slavery as an institution or the moral ground upon which it rested. Those who disagreed with its legality, moreover, often kept their opinions to themselves. Jacob de Cordova, on tour in the Northeast promoting Texas lands, laid out a position that may have resonated with many other Texas Jews and which illustrates the political circumstances in which they lived. "By a wise provision of our State Constitution," de Cordova explained, "the institution of slavery has been guaranteed to Texas." Texans were, he said, "jealous of this right and will not allow any intermeddling with the subject." It was fine to hold contrary views, he continued, and any non-slaveholder would be welcome in Texas, provided that "he shall pursue the even tenor of his way, mind his own business, and leave his neighbors to attend to theirs." For himself, de Cordova wanted it "distinctly understood that our feelings and education have always been pro-slavery."[72]

In addition to such rhetorical support for slavery, some Texas Jews participated directly in the system as slaveowners, reflecting the degree to which they were part of white life in Texas – or, more to the point, wanted to appear to

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[71] Ibid., 314, 307.

[72] Jacob de Cordova, *Lecture on Texas Delivered by Mr. J. De Cordova, at Philadelphia, New York, Mount Holly, Brooklyn and Newark. Also a paper read by him before the New York Geographical Society, April 15th, 1858* (Philadelphia: Ernest Crozet, 1858): 24-25. Copies are available at CAH and in AJA Small Collection 2721.

be part of it. The ownership of slaves, as Bertram Wallace Korn has shown, was common among Jews throughout the South, a marker of Jewish integration into the white mainstream. Using a variety of historical and genealogical data, Korn concluded that of seventy-three Jewish heads of household in 1790 South Carolina, at least thirty-four owned slaves.[73] By 1840, only seven of New Orleans's sixty-two documented Jews did *not* own slaves: the remaining fifty-five between them held some 348 African Americans in bondage, "in index," Korn says, "to growing prosperity."[74] Finally, from Southern Jewish wills collected by Jacob Rader Marcus, Korn determined that "perhaps one-fourth of Southern Jewish adults were slave-owners," a rate matching the one reported in the 1860 U.S. Census for Southern whites in general.[75] "It would seem to be realistic to conclude," Korn says, "that any Jew who could afford to own slaves and had need of their services would do so." Slavery was "an axiomatic foundation of the social pattern of the Old South" which Jews readily accepted.[76]

Since very few Texas Jews were planters, they had little need for fieldhands and laborers. As urban merchants and business people, rather, they were members of a class that saw slavery not so much as an economic necessity but as a symbol of wealth and status, a sign that they had succeeded in terms that other Texans understood. For this reason, Galveston, the state's center of commerce and cosmopolitanism, was also the center of Jewish slaveowning in

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[73] Bertram Wallace Korn, *Jews And Negro Slavery In The Old South, 1789-1865* (Elkins Park, Penn.: Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel, 1961): 16.
[74] Korn, 25.
[75] Korn, 26.
[76] Ibid.

Texas; there is little evidence of its existence elsewhere, including in the comparably wealthy community of Houston. Galveston was a major slave-trading center, and it was quite easy for Galvestonians of means to acquire slaves to use as household servants or for light work in the city. For Jews seeking to demonstrate their achievement by American standards of success, as well as to express the similarity of their values to those of their neighbors, no status symbol was as poignant as slave ownership.

The 1860 U.S. Census estimated the worth of Galveston's Joseph Osterman at $191,000, making him one of Galveston's wealthiest citizens and a typical Texas Jewish slaveowner.[77] His wife Rosanna was responsible for bringing the first piano to Texas, and she built the state's first hothouse, part of a garden "noted for its almond and olive trees, and tea and coffee plants."[78] As part of the genteel, leisured lifestyle they enjoyed, the Ostermans owned eight slaves, including a number of children.[79] Other old Jewish families in Galveston owned slaves, including Isadore Dyer, who owned a 50-year-old couple, and Samuel Maas, who owned an older couple and a teenage girl. The family of Mollie Levy, who would later become the wife of Galveston's beloved rabbi, Henry Cohen, owned at least one slave, and Mollie later kept in the home she shared with the rabbi a "low rocker, with a line like an unfinished copybook flourish, which had

[77] Ratkin, 4.
[78] Winegarten and Schechter, 20.
[79] TJHS Box 3A167, Folder 1; Winegarten and Schechter, 23. Winegarten and Schechter refer to the U.S. Census of 1850, according to which the Ostermans owned five slaves, two women and three children. Apparently the family's estate prospered in the years immediately before the Civil War.

been given to Mrs. Cohen by her family's former slave, who used to rock her to sleep in it."[80]

In spite of the social advantages of slave ownership, some Jews in Texas held anti-slavery views. Julius Henry, the first Jew to settle in Corpus Christi, recalled in a 1911 memoir the incident that led him to become an abolitionist. First arriving in Corpus Christi on foot, he had grown tired and thirsty in the July heat when he met "a little Negro dressed in a corn sack" who brought him some water from a nearby well. Henry repaid the favor by giving the boy a coin. Soon after, he was approached by a white woman who "came out and charged me with being a black Abolitionist – travelling through the country giving money to Negroes and enticing them away from their owners." After Henry failed to convince her that he intended only kindness, the woman told him that if he "did not leave at once she would call the men folks with the blood-hounds and run me off." Henry moved along willingly, "surely glad to get away from that hyena." Henry remembered that as a recent immigrant he had not formed any political opinions, "yet there and then I was made a Republican and more so an Abolitionist." When the Civil War began, Henry was drafted into the Confederate army but escaped in New Orleans to join the Federals. "My entire sentiment," he remembered, "was with the Union."[81] After the war, Henry returned to Corpus Christi, became a successful businessman, and for a brief time served the town as postmaster.

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[80] Anne Nathan and Harry I. Cohen, *The Man Who Stayed In Texas: The Life Of Rabbi Henry Cohen* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1941): 120.

[81] Untitled autobiographical statement of Julius Henry, AJA Biographies File, reprinted as "The Making of an Abolitionist," *American Jewish Archives* 13 (November 1961): 169-70.

For other Texas Jews holding anti-slavery views, the Civil War provided an opportunity to do what they knew all along was the right thing. Joseph Landa, an immigrant peddler, originally set up a shop in San Antonio, then migrated to New Braunfels in 1847, where he set up flour and saw mills, a cotton gin, and a shop in town. Along the way, he acquired five slaves, "a family of four French Creole house servants, and Steven Carter, driver of the family ox-cart."[82] When the war began, Landa offered his services to the Confederate army but was rejected because of a minor disability. He continued to operate his businesses until 1863. Then, when word of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation arrived in Texas, Landa took the initiative and freed his slaves, an act that his Confederate neighbors, who did not recognize Lincoln's authority to do anything in Texas, considered treasonous, a "gesture of abolitionism."[83] A local court tried him and determined that he had to leave the state, so Landa fled to Matamoros, where he remained until the end of the war, leaving his wife and children behind to tend the family businesses. According to Landa's son, Landa's "sympathies were with the South," but he nevertheless felt compelled to offer freedom to his slaves at a time when it was socially inexpedient to do so.

Other Texas Jews shared Landa's ambivalence toward slavery. As members of the white majority, and as Landa's experience proves, it would have been imprudent for them to speak or act against slavery, especially after Texas seceded from the Union. The majority of Texas Jews never became slaveowners and, perhaps following Jacob de Cordova's advice, kept their mouths shut about

[82] Landa, 19.
[83] Ibid.

the issue. Others who had achieved enough material success to be able to participate in the system quietly chose not to do so, while raising no vocal anti-slavery objections. Harris Kempner, for example, the first of a line of prominent Galveston cotton and sugar magnates, chose not to own slaves, though he clearly could have afforded to do so. Neither Kempner nor his son, who wrote extensively about the family, ever provided a reason for Kempner's forbearance, and both took pains to justify the institution itself even while noting the family's lack of personal involvement in it. "Though given the usual opportunity . . . to own Negro slaves," Isaac Kempner remembered, "[Father] declined to acquire any, though among his friends in East Texas their Negro slaves were well provided for and slavery regarded as humane and an economic necessity."[84] As Kempner family biographer Harold Hyman writes, "[Harris] Kempner had taken on the ways of the white South in all appropriate respects, and accommodation specifically to human slavery and to white supremacy generally was one of them."[85]

Harris Kempner himself gave perhaps the clearest possible statement of his position. When asked later in life why he, having been a victim of discrimination in Europe, had joined the Confederate Army, in part to protect slavery, he said, "I came to America to be an American, and I tried to adapt my ways to American ways." His neighbors, he noted, "were all for the South," and "I was one of them." The issue of slavery "did not mean so much to me" as "the

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[84] Isaac Herbert Kempner, "My Memories of Father," *American Jewish Archives* 19 (April 1967): 59.

[85] Harold M. Hyman, *Oleander Odyssey: The Kempners Of Galveston, Texas, 1854-1980s* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1990): 13.

right of a people to govern themselves as they thought best. I knew what it meant not to have that right."[86] Kempner's explanation is striking and deeply significant. Identifying himself wholly with white Southerners, Kempner read his own minority status as comparable to the suffering of the Southern states, not to the suffering of the slaves they were oppressing.

While Jewish Texans were hardly unified on the subject of slavery, ranging in opinion from slaveholding defenders of the peculiar institution to pro-slavery Unionists and from adamant opponents of slavery to outright secessionists, Jewish attitudes were aligned along the spectrum that contained most white opinion. Slaveholders and abolitionists alike joined a white majority in regarding an enslaved race which even the most sympathetic among them considered inferior and certainly profoundly different from themselves. Those Texas Jews who sided with the abolitionist cause were a silent minority among Texas whites, but they were nevertheless believers in a view that well-meaning whites were permitted to hold without compromising their racial identity: one could be an abolitionist, even in slaveholding Texas, without being mistaken for a slave. Without exception, Jewish Texans accepted a view consonant with those of other whites. In making their cases for or against slavery, Texas Jews drew a line between themselves and the slaves and reinforced their participation in a white racial majority.

In the years after the Civil War, Texas Jews continued their efforts to align themselves with other whites and to win their respect, and reports in non-Jewish

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[86] Quoted in Donald Day, "The Americanism of Harris Kempner," *Southwest Review* 30 (Winter 1945): 126.

newspapers demonstrate their success at doing so. When Rabbi Steiner of Houston's Congregation Beth Israel died in 1867, the Houston *Transcript* reported (and the *American Israelite* reprinted) that Steiner was "learned, profound and accomplished," "a man of great profundity as a historian and a linguist, besides being an accomplished musician and painter." The *Transcript* went on to describe Steiner as a "firm and able advocate of the Jewish faith [who] has been gathered to his fathers," and "though he disavowed the divinity of Jesus, there are few Christians . . . who will lack the charity to believe that his immortal soul is registered upon the Book of Life in the New Jerusalem prepared for God's chosen people."[87] In 1876, the Dallas *Herald* urged its readers to attend an event sponsored by the Ladies' Hebrew Benevolent Association to help raise money to build a new synagogue; Dallas Jews had been quick to answer community needs, wrote the editor, and the city owed them gratitude.[88]

Jewish newspapers also reported the success of Texas Jews at winning the admiration of their neighbors. In 1879, the *Jewish South* reported that Austin's roughly 250 Jews all seemed to be in "good circumstances, doing well and . . . very much respected among the Gentiles." Many, in fact, were "old citizens of Austin, having resided there for the past twenty-six years [who] in particular are enjoying the respect and goodwill of all."[89] Perhaps most telling is Jewish Texans' defense of their own sense of belonging, even when faced with the

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[87] *Houston Transcript* (30 September 1867), rept. *American Israelite* (18 October 1867): 6.
[88] *Dallas Herald* (22 January 1876), quoted in Elizabeth York Enstam, *Women And The Creation Of Urban Life: Dallas, Texas, 1843-1920* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1998): 50.
[89] Wessolowsky, 101.

suggestion that Jews were not, in fact, universally beloved in their communities. When, for example, someone attempted to burn down the Dallas synagogue in 1879, a correspondent from that city to the *Jewish South* expressed bewilderment that such a thing could happen. "No one can imagine the object in view," he wrote, "as our co-religionists are on the most friendly terms with their Christian neighbors." The writer, who signed himself "Lone Star," concluded that "[t]he citizens of Dallas, irrespective of religious belief, are loud in their denunciations at this deed and, if discovered, the perpetrators would fare badly."[90] These reports suggest not so much the actual acceptance of Jews in Texas cities as a Jewish wish that Jews should *seem to be* fully accepted.

When defining themselves within the ethnically cosmopolitan context of frontier Texas, however, Texas Jews were more revealing in their descriptions of themselves as distinct from a non-white "them," than they were in their descriptions of themselves as part of a white "us." Their determination to contrast themselves to other minority groups is clearest in comments they made about those other groups. Such comments mimic many of the conventional prejudices held by the state's majority white population at that time, and they express a wish among Texas Jews to disassociate themselves from the groups they target.

A letter from Rabbi Jacob Voorsanger to the *American Israelite* is a case in point. Voorsanger, the leader of Houston's Congregation Beth Israel, was widely respected and would later achieve greater national fame as a leading rabbi in San Francisco. During his years in Houston, Voorsanger succeeded in making

[90] *Jewish South* (10 October 1879).

himself a prominent member of Houston society: an 1879 report in the *Jewish South* noted that the rabbi's Friday evening services were well-attended both by Jews and Gentiles, and that he "lately has been elected president of a society, composed mostly of Christians, and has been appointed by them as the English orator for the *Volksfest* [state festival]."[91] In 1882, Voorsanger regularly contributed a column, "Lone Star Flashes," to the *American Israelite*, in which he reported on Texas activities. Following that year's Juneteenth celebration, the anniversary of the arrival in Texas of news of the Emancipation Proclamation, Voorsanger wrote to complain about the event. "The negroes had a procession," he reported, "[and] scowled at the white folks, upon whom they are absolutely depending for bread and meat." He blamed the celebrants – and Republican agitators – for the death of a white citizen and the assault of a police officer. At times like this, Voorsanger continued, "one feels that the colored gentlemen are being very far from the level where a white man cares to meet with them." They are acceptable, he said, "if pursuing their ordinary avocations as the hewers of wood and water carriers of society," but when Republicans stir up their "sluggish blood" they become "intolerable, if not absolutely dangerous."[92] Voorsanger's language – as well as his lack of sympathy for the black celebrants and his antipathy toward the Republican Party – repeat the conventional wisdom of the white mainstream in post-Reconstruction Texas. Rather than join African Americans in celebrating their escape from slavery (as, indeed, Jews do every year at Passover), Voorsanger used the opportunity to voice common prejudices

[91] Wessolowsky, 89.
[92] Jacob Voorsanger, "Lone Star Flashes," *American Israelite* (23 June 1882): 419.

and to condemn Yankee agitators: it is less the comment of the leader of a persecuted minority than that of a vocal member of the white majority.

Another prominent Jewish Texan of the post-Reconstruction period revealed a more sympathetic attitude toward African Americans, but one still tinged with the prejudices and paternalism common to the day. When William Levy, the Jewish mayor of the North Texas town of Sherman, addressed an integrated crowd at the opening of a black technical school in his city in 1890, he spoke glowingly of African-American achievement – particularly that of "Fred Douglass."[93] He reserved his highest praise, however, for the Jewish people whose experience he felt should serve as a model for the new school's disadvantaged students. Holding himself up as the image of success, he asked them to "look me right in the face" to behold "a man whose ancestors were also slaves . . . and they were longer in slavery and worked harder and suffered more under the rod of the overseer and the lash of the tyrant than you and your fathers and mothers." All the nations that had persecuted Jews, he said, had crumbled into dust, while "Israel has remained, has outlived them all." His black listeners could hope for similar success, he said, if they would follow the Jewish example and "work intelligently, patiently and tirelessly."[94]

Levy's real message, however, came through later: in addition to the necessary hard work, black Texans should also learn to keep their place if they hoped to succeed. They must, he said, behave themselves appropriately,

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[93] William Levy in *Sabbath Visitor* (1 September 1890 and 15 September 1890), rept. as "A Jew Views Black Education: Texas – 1890," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly* 8 (July 1976): 359.
[94] Levy, 352-53.

recognizing "that it is wrong to lie, to slander, to insult . . . that it is wrong to cheat, defraud, deceive, to be dishonest, steal or kill; that it is wrong to disturb the peace, to quarrel and fight, to get drunk, play cards for money, or 'shoot craps,' as you call it." Moreover, he advised that "the farther they keep away from politics and politicians, and attend rather to their families and their bread and meat, the more blessing they will deserve."[95] Levy's self-serving address emphasized the importance of keeping the peace and discouraging black political activity, even as it held out to his black listeners the promise of equality if they remained patient and played by the rules the majority set for them. As mayor of the city, Levy had reason to encourage peacefulness and order; as a Jew he had the example of Jewish achievement to allude to; as a liberal he claimed to have the best interests of his listeners at heart. His speech, however, was a thinly veiled attempt to keep his audience in line and to delay their advancement as long as possible. While willing to use his Jewishness as part of his appeal, Levy identified primarily with his position as a white Texan and a civic official rather than with his listeners' experience.

In eastern Texas, where Voorsanger and Levy lived, African Americans were the major minority group against which Jews could define themselves. In other parts of the state other groups predominated, and Jews faced them as well in their efforts to distinguish themselves within the state's complex racial mixture. In El Paso, Laredo, Brownsville and smaller border communities, Jews worked closely with Mexicans and Mexican Texans as neighbors, employees, and

[95] Levy, 354.

customers. Whereas in East Texas, African Americans were an influential minority whose friendship Jews sometimes sought but could ultimately live without, Spanish-speakers were often the majority group in the border communities. Thus Jews, who were typically retailers and depended upon the goodwill of their customers, could afford to be neither patronizing nor neglectful toward them. As a result, their relationship with Mexican and Mexican-American people was in many ways more complex than that with blacks. They frequently absorbed the prejudices common among whites, but at the same time could not escape the pervasive influence of Mexican culture and often came to admire its color and vibrancy.

A case in point is Ernst Kohlberg and the opinions he expressed toward Mexicans and their culture in a remarkable series of letters to his family in Germany. Kohlberg arrived in El Paso in 1875 as the protégé of Samuel Schutz, a fellow Westphalian who had set up shop in the town several years before and who drafted Kohlberg as a store assistant in his establishments on both sides of the Rio Grande: under their agreement Kohlberg would work without pay for several months to reimburse Schutz for the cost of his transportation from Europe. Despite his initial homesickness – "I want to tell you," he wrote, "that this place is nearly the end of the world and the last of creation" – and his basic dissatisfaction with the contract that had taken him there, Kohlberg soon warmed to El Paso and its Mexican atmosphere.[96] He began simultaneously studying both English and Spanish, and described for his family the distinctive foods he was enjoying in his

[96] Ernst Kohlberg, *Letters of Ernst Kohlberg, 1875-1877*, tr. and ed. Walter K. Kohlberg (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1973): 14.

new home. Principal among these, he said, was "chile or Spanish pepper": "[i]t is eaten green when roasted, tho the Mexicans even eat it raw, or it is eaten cooked with cheese when it is ripe." At first, he wrote "chile and everything connected with it was a hellish kind of food for me," but after nearly a year in Texas, "I almost can swallow it like a Mexican and I miss it if it is not served."[97] A photograph Kohlberg sent back home after six years in El Paso showed him wearing a broad *sombrero*, Mexican blanket, and a thick black beard, armed with a long six-shooter.[98] Costume or not, Kohlberg was clearly reveling in his new frontier identity, including the strong Mexican influence El Paso offered him.

As generations of Texans would do after him, Kohlberg learned to distinguish between "[t]he Mexicans one sees on this side of the Rio Grande," who are "ugly and ragged," and those across the river, where there were "a number of better class Mexican families."[99] West Texas, he wrote, "is very poor" and economic prospects are bleak for everyone there, so anyone with ambition should "arrange to spend one's time where there is more civilization," by which he meant within Mexico itself. He attended a ball in Paso del Norte, as Juárez, the Mexican city opposite El Paso, was then known, and noted admiringly the "Mexican men with their politeness and their ladies with their grace," and he described the event in detail for his family.[100] Kohlberg had absorbed enough of the local culture, then, to be able to make distinctions among various classes of Spanish-speaking people.

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[97] Kohlberg, 39.
[98] Kohlberg, photographic plate between pp. 23 and 24.
[99] Kohlberg, 26-27.
[100] Kohlberg, 28-29.

In addition to the Mexican and Mexican-American populations, Kohlberg also learned to distinguish between various local groups of Native Americans. As was common among whites on the American frontier, Kohlberg expressed respect for those tribal groups whose weakened condition rendered them no longer a threat to white life and commerce; others, who remained hostile to Anglo settlement, received his condemnation. With faint praise, perhaps, he described the Pueblo of nearby New Mexico as "not savages" and contrasted them to Comanches and Apaches, who were "wild Indians." Kohlberg attended a Pueblo dance festival and described it in detail – though he was aesthetically unimpressed with what he saw. "The noise of their musical instruments and their singing," he wrote, "gave me a headache from which I did not recover for two days." He found no "grace or beauty" in their dances, observing that the "continuous hopping up and down is very hard work and the sweat trickles from the heads of the dancing men and women." Nevertheless, Kohlberg revealed a genuine interest in the Pueblos' culture, and offered to write more about "these red men when I know them better."[101] As further evidence of his interest in Native American culture, he collected a pair of Comanche moccasins which he sent back to Germany as a curiosity.

Kohlberg showed no interest, however, in learning more about the Apache, who were then, as he said, "on the war-path." He told his family about a raid in which Apaches robbed a shipment of Mexican merchandise on the road to Santa Fe and wounded the driver.[102] After American soldiers took the lives of

[101] Kohlberg, 29.
[102] Kohlberg, 31.

fifteen Apaches in response to another raid, Kohlberg reassured his family that he was safe. "Do not for a moment think that we are in any danger from this band," he wrote. The Apaches' "chief characteristics are their cowardice, their love of thievery, and their hatred of any kind of work," and thus, he seemed to feel, they were ultimately harmless.[103] To Kohlberg, as to most whites on the American frontier, Indians represented the opposite of civilization: "Some years ago the Indians were so numerous in the state of Chihuahua," he wrote, "that they nearly made a desert of it." He asked his family not to sympathize with "the redskin dogs."[104] With such comments, Kohlberg showed the degree to which he had identified himself with his new environment and with the Anglo and Mexican population there. Whereas "people in Germany," he wrote, had pity for the Indians, "my idea of what to do with them is to force them to jump off of the Klinge cliffs."[105] No longer a German, Kohlberg had joined the ranks of American frontiersmen and expressed himself as such through his loathing of the frontiersman's traditional enemy.

Through all their efforts to merge into the white Texas mainstream, set themselves apart from the state's racial minorities, and establish their own distinctive religious and communal structures, Texas Jews still felt the lack of Jewish institutions and facilities. In 1873, David Hirsch of Corpus Christi was obliged, in an almost Faulkneresque event, to carry his wife's body 130 miles on a horsecart to bury her in a Jewish cemetery; the incident so affected one of the

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[103] Kohlberg, 40.
[104] Kohlberg, 44.
[105] Ibid.

leading gentile citizens of Corpus Christi that he donated a plot of land in town to establish the Hebrew Rest Cemetery.[106] Jewish Texans also remained self-conscious about their distance from other, larger Jewish communities. Ernst Kohlberg wrote repeatedly that he might have done better to have remained in New York, where he first arrived in America, rather than to make his way to El Paso, a place which, he told his family, even New Yorkers spoke of as "so far away, about the same as you do."[107] A writer in Corpus Christi expressed to the readers of the *American Israelite* his awareness of how they must see him and his environment: "I presume you have scarcely heard of this delectable place," he claimed, "except perhaps as a place infested with Mexican robbers and cut-throats." Nevertheless, he said, reminding them of the name of his town, "know that within this body of Christ there lives no less than forty-five Jews and Jewesses, adults and children, a goodly number for an out-of-the-way town on the Texas frontier."[108] The message was clear: we do have Jews and Jewish community in Texas, but you, up there in the big cities, do not yet know about it. Making the rest of the nation's Jews aware of Texas Jewry, and demonstrating to

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[106] Frank Wagner, untitled biography of David Hirsch, TJHS Box 3A165, Folder 4; Frank Wagner to Bryan Stone (1 September 1995). See also Fanny Weil Alexander, "Charles and Sarah Weil," TJHS Box 3A167, Folder 3.
[107] Kohlberg, 28.
[108] *American Israelite* (16 July 1875).

them that it was a legitimate, if unfamiliar, form of Judaism, was the next project ahead.

Chapter 3. "Verily We are Scattered": Seeking the Promised Land in Texas

"There's a story of a lad in Sunday School who was asked to name the birthplace of Jesus," wrote Texas journalist Lewis Nordyke. "He guessed Gladewater, Mount Pleasant, and Bonham . . . . When told the answer was Palestine, he said, 'I knew it was in East Texas somewhere.'"[1] Palestine, Texas, the seat of Anderson County, was probably named after the town of Palestine, Illinois, the former home of an early resident, though one early Jewish resident claimed that the town was "named after the holy land of our ancestry."[2] Nevertheless, and despite its peculiar pronunciation ("PALasteen"), the name has provided Christians and Jews alike with many opportunities to suggest a direct relationship between Texas and the biblical Promised Land. In 1879 Charles Wessolowsky, the associate editor of the Atlanta-based *Jewish South*, visited Palestine on a trip through the South and made much of the name as a way of criticizing the town's Jews for their religious laxity. "From the bustle of life in the street, on Sunday," he wrote, "we thought that we were indeed in Palestine, where Saturday is strictly observed by our people, [and] Sunday [is] the business day. Alas, upon inquiring we were told that we were mistaken and that in this Palestine no Saturday is kept."[3] Moreover, Wessolowsky complained, Palestine's Jews had grown complacent, apparently content that they already possessed the

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[1] Lewis Nordyke. *The Truth About Texas* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1957): 112-113.
[2] *Jewish South* (8 March 1878).
[3] Charles Wessolowsky, *Reflections of Southern Jewry: The Letters of Charles Wessolowsky, 1878-1879*, ed. Louis Schmier (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1982): 104.

Promised Land. "All [seem] to be in glee and full of good prospects," he wrote, "satisfied with their Palestine, and are not willing any longer to repeat the prayer of the [Passover] Hagadah, that next year they may be in the true Palestine." Unfortunately, as Wessolowsky saw it, "this State of fertile soil and rich prairies, with all of its facilities and advantages may perhaps be preferable and more sought for than the dry and barren country of the Palestine of our fathers."[4]

The idea that Texas might contain, or even *be*, a Jewish promised land was more than a pun: as the state's Jewish population grew, developed its own religious and cultural institutions, and acculturated into the Texas mainstream, the pursuit of a homeland anywhere else seemed unnecessary and undesirable. In the years between 1880 and 1900, Texas's Jewish population increased more than fivefold: by 1900 there were about 15,000 Jewish Texans, equal to the Jewish population of Virginia and more than that of Florida, Louisiana, Michigan, Georgia, or Colorado. More Jews lived in Texas, in fact, than in any other Southern state except Virginia and more than in any other Western state except California (See Table 2).[5] Texas Jews had enthusiastically carried on the process of establishing congregations and schools, benevolent societies and clubs, as well as a tremendous program of synagogue building, and by the turn of the century the state's largest cities enjoyed all of the facilities necessary to support modern

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[4] Wessolowsky, 105-106.

[5] *American Jewish Yearbook 1914-1915* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1915): 376.

Table 2. Jewish Population of the United States, by State and Region, 1900

Location	Jewish Population	Location	Jewish Population
United States	1,058,135*		
Northeast	634,580	*Midwest*	250,500
Connecticut	8,000	Illinois	95,000
Delaware	1,080	Indiana	25,000
Maine	5,000	Iowa	6,000
Maryland	35,000	Kansas	3,000
Massachusetts	60,000	Michigan	9,000
New Hampshire	1,000	Minnesota	6,000
New Jersey	25,000	Missouri	35,000
New York	400,000	Nebraska	3,000
Pennsylvania	95,000	North Dakota	n/a
Rhode Island	3,500	Ohio	50,000
Vermont	1,000	South Dakota	3,500
		Wisconsin	15,000
South	111,635	*West*	55,300
Alabama	8,000	Arizona	2,000
Arkansas	4,000	California	25,000
Florida	3,000	Colorado	8,000
Georgia	6,135	Idaho	2,000
Kentucky	12,000	Montana	2,500
Louisiana	12,000	Nevada	n/a
Mississippi	5,000	New Mexico	1,500
North Carolina	12,000	Oregon	5,500
Oklahoma	n/a	Utah	5,000
South Carolina	8,000	Washington	2,800
Tennessee	10,000	Wyoming	1,000
Texas	15,000		
Virginia	15,000		
West Virginia	1,500		

Source: *American Jewish Yearbook 1914-1915* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1915): 376.

*The *American Jewish Yearbook* apparently did not arrive at this figure by totaling the state figures provided here. I have reproduced it as given.

Jewish life. If in many places Jewish institutions remained rudimentary, in others they were sophisticated and occasionally even redundant.

The rapid development of Jewish communities, however, occurred alongside the rise of the modern Zionist movement in Europe and America, which ran counter to the community-building ideology of Jews in Texas: if Jerusalem was the only proper home for the Jewish people, then why should they waste their effort in San Antonio? "To admit that American Jewry required inspiration from a center in Palestine," historian Michael A. Meyer has written, "amounted to an admission of failure. It meant that American Jewry, instead of being the leading edge of the Judaism of the future, the focal point of spiritual development, was relegated to the periphery, robbed of its independence."[6] Zionism was popular among Eastern European Jews, whose need for a secure refuge was especially great, and many of them brought their Zionist passion with them to America. But American Reform Jews, with roots in the emancipated and integrated Jewish communities of Central Europe, showed little enthusiasm for the idea of a Jewish homeland beyond those they were already creating, nor did they wish to give the impression to other Americans that they were divided in their national loyalties.

The possibility that Texas could provide as secure and meaningful a home as any idealized Jewish state was an idea that ran throughout the history of Jewish settlement there. On many occasions, most importantly during the Galveston Immigration Movement of the early twentieth century, non-Zionist Jewish leaders explicitly described Texas as a viable alternative to Palestine or as a passageway

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[6] Michael A. Meyer, "American Reform Judaism and Zionism: Early Efforts at Ideological Rapprochement," *Studies in Zionism* 7 (Spring 1983): 54.

to other possible "homelands" in America. At the same time, however, the state's population of Eastern European Jews was increasing – largely through the direct efforts of non-Zionist programs like the Galveston Movement – and these Jews brought with them a zeal to help establish a sovereign Jewish state. As one immigrant to San Antonio wrote, America was only a "resting place" for these Jews, a "city of refuge," and they began forming Zionist clubs and affiliating with national and international Zionist organizations.[7] Texas, then, was a place where the ideologies of Zionism and non-Zionism collided, where the Zionist hope for a centralized homeland met the immediate wish to strengthen present communities and thus to permit Jewish culture to continue its dispersion throughout the world. In Texas, the centrifugal forces pushing the Jewish people into a more dispersed global existence met the centripetal forces pulling them into geographical and spiritual centers, and Palestine, the Promised Land, was both a town in Texas and a dream beyond it.

While Texas Jews had always understood that their lives lay on the outskirts of Jewish life, they had frequently offered Texas as an ideal home for the Jewish people. As early as 1850, Lewis A. Levy, a Houston merchant and unofficial leader of that city's tiny Jewish community, took advantage of the image that Texas had already begun to acquire as an agricultural paradise to encourage his fellow Jews to venture there. In a letter to the *Asmonean*, a Jewish paper published in New York, he argued that Europe's Jews, suffering at the hands of despots and dictators, would have much better opportunities in America.

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[7] Alexander Ziskind Gurwitz, *Memories of Two Generations*, tr. Amram Prero, vol. 2 [c.1932]: 250.

"The amount of one year's tax where they now are," Levy claimed, "would pay for their transmigration, and then a whole continent would be open for them to settle in where they choose." Suggesting, as did others of his time, that the Jews' future lay in a return to agrarian life, Levy recommended Texas as a particularly suitable site for agricultural colonization: "In our own State," he wrote, "thousands of acres of land can be bought, within the settled portions of the State for the small sum of from 25 cents to $1 per acre; good arable, fertile land, where a man can make his living to his liking."[8]

Levy gave his appeal a decidedly Jewish spin by suggesting that the ownership of Texas land would make Jews "more independent than the Autocrat of Russia or the Emperor of Austria," both of whom had instituted conspicuously anti-Semitic policies. "Indeed," he continued, "I would not exchange my fifteen acre lot, with the house on it, and the garden around it, which I possess near the city of Houston for all thrones and hereditary dominions of both those noted persons." The future would reveal, he said, "who will have a shelter of their own 15 years from now."[9] National Jewish spokesmen shared Levy's enthusiasm for marrying Jewish national hopes to Texas real estate. In the late 1870s, Charles Wessolowsky and the editors of the *Jewish South* reported often on the successes of Jewish agriculture in the Southern states, particularly in Texas, and tried to encourage support for the idea on a national level: they occasionally printed offers from Texas Jews to donate land at little or no charge to Jewish organizations

[8] *Asmonean* (28 June 1850).
[9] Ibid.

seeking to colonize it.[10] During a visit to Hempstead, Texas, Wessolowsky remarked on the achievement of a handful of independent Jewish farmers there and suggested "how well it would be for some of our Jewish brethren living in those barbarous countries of Russia and Rumania to immigrate here to Texas, form Jewish colonies, [and] on this fertile soil pursue the avocation of our forefathers, [becoming] shepherds like Moses and David." Wessolowsky advanced the argument that in Texas, "where millions of uncultivated acres cry out for immigration, civilization and progress," Jews could "throw off their Russian shackles and Rumanian fetters and come here to this land of liberty and be a blessing to themselves and to this country."[11]

Texas lands offered, that is, a chance for the Jewish people to recenter themselves, to restore their true historical identity as a nation of ethically upright warriors and farmers rather than remaining the despised urban class of moneylenders and bankers which hard European experience had turned them into.[12] Whereas later generations of Jews sought to recenter themselves through the geographical and spiritual promises of Zionism, Levy and Wessolowsky saw an immediate opportunity to do so in Texas, where Jews could fulfill their hopes in safety and security.[13] As Wessolowsky later noted in the Texas town of Palestine, where "no Saturday is kept," such a transformation might come at a

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[10] See, for example, M. Levy to Editor, *Jewish South* (5 September 1879); M. Schwartz to Editor, *American Israelite* (8 August 1879).
[11] Wessolowsky, 86-87.
[12] Thanks to Professor Robert Abzug for this insight and for the language in which I have expressed it.
[13] Such appeals were by no means unique to Texas. See, for example, Robert Alan Goldberg, *Back to the Soil: The Jewish Farmers of Clarion, Utah, and Their World* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1986).

spiritual cost in terms of the daily practices of the faith, but it was nevertheless an appealing idea to him.[14]

For Lewis Levy, the key to what he imagined as the normative Jewish experience of landed self-empowerment was the ownership of real property. While probably not responding directly to his appeal, a number of early Texas Jews took advantage of the opportunity to purchase relatively inexpensive land. For those who had lived under property restrictions in Europe, the symbolic value of land ownership was hard to resist: Texas offered precisely what Europe had denied them. Harris Kempner, for example, the patriarch of one of Galveston's most successful business families, "had great faith in Texas and in Texas lands," his son Isaac recalled. Kempner, who arrived in Texas in 1854, "came from the agricultural section of Poland and knew land was treasured there, but those in his religious and social status could not – were not permitted to – acquire it. He had great esteem for his right in this country to acquire land."[15] Kempner biographer Harold Hyman claims that Harris "avoided investing in Galveston real estate save for the substantial commitments of his own residences and shops, choosing instead cotton or cattle-grazing acreage on the mainland," and these investments paid off handsomely in the next generation, as inland property in Sugar Land, near Houston, facilitated the family's diversification into the sugar industry.[16] Other prominent Jewish landowners included Mitchell Westheimer, the leader of

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[14] Wessolowsky, 104.
[15] Isaac Herbert Kempner, "My Memories of Father," *American Jewish Archives* 19 (April 1967): 57.
[16] Harold M. Hyman, *Oleander Odyssey: The Kempners of Galveston, Texas, 1854-1980s* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1990): 114, 207ff.

another powerful business clan, who came to Texas in 1858 and soon purchased a 640-acre tract in what is now central Houston.[17] And in perhaps the most impressive example, the Halff family of San Antonio came to control more than six million acres of ranch land in West Texas in the years after the Civil War.[18]

Such cases of large-scale property ownership were not, however, the norm; like Lewis Levy himself, most Texas Jews were merchants in the state's urban communities. Even the Halffs kept their homes and a substantial retail business in San Antonio, traveling to their distant property only when absolutely necessary. Indeed, harsh experience stripped of the sheen of promotion and the vagueness of ideology taught that Jews were largely unprepared for the demands of a Texas agrarian life. Rabbi Jacob Voorsanger of Houston, writing in the *American Israelite*, tried to dispel the "touching up of realities with the glow of poetry" that he had noticed in Jewish press accounts of the frontier. He described the experiences of three Russian immigrants he knew who had arrived in Texas hoping to make a living as farmers. "[U]nder the hot sun of Texas their fortitude has given way," he wrote, "and . . . the mosquitoes have stung all their agricultural fancies out of them." Complaining that "the country was too hot during the summer months," these immigrants were seeking work in the city of Houston. "It seems to me," Voorsanger mused, "that young men of sturdy frame who can not stand the midsummer sun will hardly become good farmers." Despite their sincere hopes of making a return to the land – and their impressive if

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[17]Lionel M. Schooler, "Mitchell (Michael) Louis Westheimer (1831-c.1910)," TJHS Box 3A167, Folder 5.

[18] Ruthe Winegarten and Cathy Schechter, *Deep in the Heart* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1990): 38; Phil Hewitt, *The Jewish Texans* (San Antonio: Institute of Texas Cultures, 1974): 7-8.

inutile university educations – "these three refugees are out of work, hard-up, foot-sore and entirely undeceived as to the romance of farming." None of this was to say that Texas was not suitable territory for agricultural Judaism, Voorsanger emphasized, but only in the form of organized, well-populated colonies.[19]

Such organized efforts, however, also met with little success. Any attempt to promote a Jewish "return" to agriculture required that potential farmers acquire skills that had been lost to their ancestors for millennia. Most European Jews in the nineteenth century lived under laws that deprived them of property rights and restricted the careers they could hold; these prohibitions permitted few of them to become farmers. In addition, the constant threat of legal persecution or even physical attack strengthened feelings of kinship and community and encouraged Europe's Jews to live near one another, usually in the cities, where they became predominantly merchants, artisans and tradespeople. The great majority of Jews arriving in the United States with these skills remained in the large Eastern cities. Even those who made their way inland tended to cluster in towns where they could practice the trades familiar to them in Europe or, as in countless cases, survive by peddling merchandise over a wide area. Generations of experience had conditioned them to be urban folk, and it did not occur to most of them that they could become farmers or should want to.

Despite these obstacles, ideologically driven Jewish leaders saw security and prosperity in a return to the land, and they established means to support Jews

[19] [Rabbi Jacob Voorsanger,] "Lone Star Flashes," *American Israelite* (23 June 1882).

who wished to become farmers. Organizations like the Baron de Hirsch Fund, which sponsored the Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society (JAIAS), expended great energy and financial resources to make Jewish agriculture feasible. Agriculture, in the Baron's words, would provide European refugees with "the possibility of finding a new existence . . . as noble and responsible subjects of a humane government."[20] Between 1900 and 1933, the JAIAS closed loans to Jewish farmers in the amount of more than $6 million, which went to support more than 9,000 individual farms.[21]

The de Hirsch Fund's success at relocating immigrant Jews to the agricultural frontier was limited, however, by its administrators' desire to keep the colonists close to established centers of Jewish population. The Fund provided assistance to Jewish farmers in forty U.S. states and Canada, but the bulk of these expenditures went to communities in the Northeast: about 70% of the total was expended only in New York State, New Jersey, and Connecticut, while just 16% made it across the Mississippi River.[22] The Fund's leaders felt strongly that, however beneficial farming could be to Jewish character and self-sufficiency, agricultural colonies would fail if they did not permit the colonists to enjoy a traditional religious life, which necessitated a close relationship with major communities. In addition to such religious concerns, many of the Fund's benefactors lived in New York and Philadelphia and wished to be able to travel

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[20] Gabriel Davidson, *Our Jewish Farmers and the Story of the Jewish Agricultural Society* (New York: L.B. Fischer, 1943): 9.
[21] Samuel Joseph, *History of the Baron de Hirsch Fund: The Americanization of the Jewish Immigrant* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1935): 288.
[22] Ibid.

conveniently to the farms and communities where their money was being spent. Thus these farming colonies were essentially appendages to the larger communities that supported them rather than true frontier settlements: agriculture could only provide a secure Jewish future, it seemed, if it did not stray too far from urban communities.

Texas, out on the periphery of urban Jewish consciousness, received only a moderate amount of support from the JAIAS, about $9,000 to support thirteen independent farms.[23] In addition to making payments to individual farmers, the Society briefly considered Texas as a possible site for organized colonization, and they sponsored a scouting expedition to report on conditions there. These researchers worked for three months on Texas farms but ultimately found the heat oppressive and the land dry, and they recommended against any attempt to establish Jewish colonies there.[24] On one occasion, though, prompted by the willingness of local leaders to oversee a colony themselves, the Society funded a small and ultimately abortive project near Tyler, in East Texas. The Tyler Committee, a local group under the leadership of Rabbi Maurice Faber, proposed a novel way of managing distant colonies. The JAIAS was to provide the funding, while the colonists and the Tyler Committee would oversee the project amd make regular reports back to the Society in New York. Leaders in both New York and Tyler saw the plan as a possible model for future colonies in more distant parts of the West, perhaps laying the foundation for a network of local committees to

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[23] Ibid.

[24] Gabriel Davidson and Edward A. Goodwin, "A Unique Agricultural Colony," AJA Small Collection 2375, reprinted from *The Reflex* (May 1928).

operate colonies in their own areas. The Society put up the money for the purchase of land and equipment, and in 1904 five Russian-Jewish families were relocated and put to work. Within the year, an outbreak of malaria forced them to abandon the project and to relocate to older colonies in the East.[25]

Anecdotal evidence shows that another colony of Russian-Jewish farmers in Texas was established in 1912 near Midline, northeast of Houston, but it was apparently a private effort independent of the JAIAS. A group of Eastern European Jews in St. Louis bought 4,300 acres of land and named it the Ida Straus Subdivision in honor of the New York philanthropist who had recently perished on the *Titanic*. The leader of the project was Jacob Goodman, an Orthodox Jew who oversaw the delivery of kosher food to the site from Houston every Friday and the construction of a *shul* in which the colonists held regular services. "The San Jacinto River," a later observer reported, "was their *Mikveh*." The colony lasted perhaps four years, threatened constantly by the same malaria-carrying mosquitoes that ruined the Tyler colony, until its discouraged members dispersed to various Texas cities.[26] In addition to insect plagues, the problems of organizing, funding and maintaining a colony so far from the centers of Jewish finance and influence remained overwhelming.

While Texas's remoteness from Jewish centers of philanthropy and community organization was an obstacle to successful agricultural colonization,

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[25] Joseph, 134-35; Davidson, 24-25. Davidson here misidentifies Rabbi Faber as "the Rev. M. Farber." For biographical information on Rabbi Faber (though without information on the Tyler Committee), see Hollace Ava Weiner, "The Mixers: The Role of Rabbis Deep in the Heart of Texas," *American Jewish History* 85 (September 1997): 325-28 and Weiner, *Jewish Stars*, 38-57.
[26] Robert I. Kahn to Jacob R. Marcus (5 June 1959), AJA Small Collection 2375. Rabbi Kahn wrote to Marcus of his conversation about the colony with Goodman's son, and he also referred to the colony in an interview with the author (7 October 1995).

some planners nevertheless used its remoteness as a selling point. Whatever the hardships of distance, the wide open spaces of the Texas frontier were a major inducement, and the mythic scale of the Texas landscape seems to have encouraged big thinking. A 1913 report in the *Jewish Herald* of Houston described a plan to do nothing less than to "acquire an expansive acreage of untilled soil and transport the entire Jewish population of Roumania – 250,000 Roumanians – from their native country into the heart of Texas, the largest State in the American Union." As Herman Loeb, the director of the Philadelphia Department of Supplies and the plan's instigator, described it, such an arrangement would not only save the lives of Roumania's Jews but would provide needed workers to bring the remaining American frontier under cultivation. "Our country is in dire need of development," he claimed, and food prices remained high "due in large measure to the fact that thousands of acres of land are allowed to remain idle and do not produce anything." Texas, he continued, contained plenty of unused land, and the arrival of 250,000 hard-working immigrants would be a "blessing for Texas, whose surface has scarcely been scratched by the plow of the husbandman." [27]

The *Herald* reported that Texans seconded this emphasis on the availability of uncultivated land and the opportunities it could provide. One supporter from San Antonio told Loeb of "the notable success of the people who have settled in Texas" and of "the acres of workable land waiting to be developed; of the vastness of the State and the opportunity almost at hand." A recent sale of

[27] "Director Loeb Plans to Bring Kaufman Jews Here," *Jewish Herald* (4 September 1913).

Texas lands for as little as fifteen dollars an acre illustrated "that there must be plenty of vacant acreage in that State."[28] The Roumanian plan, like the agricultural colonies that preceded it, never came to fruition: if it had, it would have brought a new Jewish population equivalent to 6% of the state's total population and increased the Jewish population more than fifteen-fold. The support for the plan, however, demonstrates the continuing belief that Texas could become a kind of promised land for the Jewish people. At the same time, supporters of the Roumanian plan added to the now-familiar promise of security, freedom and prosperity the suggestion that such immigration would be a blessing to Texas as well, where there was land "waiting to be developed." Texas was good for the Jews, and the Jews were good for Texas.

Such optimism about the benefits of faraway Texas was, of course, hardly universal, and proposals like the Roumanian plan ran counter to the Zionist argument that the only long-term solution to Europe's "Jewish question" was a sovereign Jewish Palestine; American communities like Texas were necessarily inferior, marginal and temporary. Eastern European immigrants, who began arriving in great numbers in New York and other Northeastern cities after 1880, took a generation to begin filtering into these outlying areas, which remained dominated by German-style Reform Jews until well into the twentieth century. Eastern European immigrants, steeped in Zionism, brought a radically different vision for the future, one that seemed to ask native Texas Jews to abandon the communities they had struggled to build and to imagine their futures elsewhere.

[28] Ibid.

Zionism emphasized Jewish distinctiveness, its separate nationhood, rather than promoting a sense of belonging to Diaspora communities; it asked its American adherents to identify themselves with a nation yet undeclared rather than with the nation that had already welcomed them. Such an ideology was greeted coldly in Texas, as elsewhere in the American South and West, where the work of community-building was recent and where Reform Judaism was strongest.

A peculiar story from the winter of 1904 illustrates the difficulties of introducing political Zionism to a Reform-dominated place like Texas. Jacob de Haas – the British-born secretary of the Federation of American Zionists, editor of its journal, *The Maccabaean*, and formerly the personal secretary of Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism – set out on a two-month tour of the American South to promote Zionist organization in the region. He had his work cut out for him: before his trip there were only eight chartered Zionist groups in the Southern states, numbering about 150 members out of a Jewish population of more than 60,000.[29]

The vast majority of Southern Jews were followers of Reform, which had liberalized Jewish religious practice in order to make it more suitable for American life and more acceptable to the American public. Reform leaders, especially Isaac Mayer Wise of Cincinnati, virulently opposed Zionism on the grounds that it emphasized Jews' national distinctiveness rather than their Americanism. Rabbi Wise had trained nearly all the Reform rabbis in the South,

[29] David Geffen, "A Sentimental Journey – Early Zionist Activities in the South – The Diary of Jacob de Haas' Trip in 1904," *Forum on the Jewish People, Zionism and Israel* 34 (Winter 1979): 161-62. Geffen provides no citation for his population estimate or an explanation of how he arrived at this figure. I have used it here, however, in order to maintain the impact of Geffen's comparison with the number of active Zionists, which is based on his own research.

and they shared his opposition to Zionism. In turn, these rabbis passed their misgivings on to their congregations, often characterizing Zionism in incomplete or unfair ways. In Montgomery, Alabama, de Haas met a Jew "who seemed to think that somehow Zionism and Christian Science must be related. Verily the Southern Rabbis have promulgated strange ideas amongst the people."[30] In Beaumont, Texas, he noted that he did not find "that the Reform Jew is per se an Anti-Zionist; in most cases he is so out of respect for his Rabbi, mostly because he has not the faintest notion as to its objects."[31] One Alabama woman expressed interest in the movement but wanted a clarification: "must we all go back to Palestine[?]"[32] De Haas optimistically claimed that Zionism had made "rapid strides" in the South, but it was clear that a major educational campaign was still necessary to bring most Southern Jews around to the Zionist cause.[33]

For de Haas, Zionism was more than a matter of Jewish political sovereignty: it represented the best hope of counteracting the damage that the Diaspora had done to Jewish consciousness around the world. He saw Southern communities as "naturally estranging places" where Jews lived "peculiar lives" and where Jewish tradition was deteriorating. "The orthodox Jew," he wrote in Texas, "is allowed to shift for himself, there is no organization to strengthen his consciousness, and in the long run orthodoxy in the South is more a matter of opinion than a matter of practice." Southern Jews seemed to him shallow and materialistic, "far too ready to land themselves communally into debt in order to

[30] Geffen, 165.
[31] Geffen, 167.
[32] Geffen, 165.
[33] Geffen, 161.

build synagogues and temples, than to give sufficient heed to Jewish education."[34] Zionism, in effect, was to be the cure for the disease of dispersion: in Savannah, Georgia, de Haas described for an audience of professed non-Zionists "the Jewish brotherhood which Zionism is creating, the measure of love and sacrifice it is calling forth," and he "pleaded for support on the basis of Jewish pride and dignity."[35] What was at stake was not only the Zionist movement itself. "[W]e have not only to make Zionists of hundreds of Jews," he wrote, "but . . . there are thousands of Jews whom we must endeavor somehow to save as Jews for their own sakes, and the sake of the house of Israel." It was essential that the scattered supporters of the movement understand that "they are not an isolated handful struggling against the odds, but part and parcel of Jewry in a real and actual sense." [36] He was a messenger, that is, for the idea that Judaism had a genuine spiritual core. The Zionist movement he represented sought not only to restore the Jews' geographical center, but also to secure the spiritual center of authentic Jewish faith, tradition and practice which the Diaspora experience was destroying.

But by the time de Haas arrived in Texas, the most westerly portion of his journey, he was becoming despondent about the breadth of the dispersion and the degree to which isolation and contact with gentiles had eroded Southern Jews' sense of their distinctiveness. On the morning of Christmas Eve, a Saturday, de Haas arrived in Waco, where he hoped to spend a quiet Sabbath recuperating from twenty-four days of constant travel and activity. "After the continual whirr and

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[34] Geffen, 168.
[35] Geffen, 164.
[36] Geffen, 166.

excitement of this trip," he wrote, "I resolved to spend the Sabbath far from . . . the routine of my work, in order to renew my energies." Waco, he expected, was far enough: "I snugged away into a little Texan town." But the Jewish names over many of the downtown stores aroused his curiosity, and as he made inquiries he learned "that almost every town on the route between Houston and Waco had its little collection of Jews, from a single family to twenty or twenty-five."[37] De Haas had, in fact, passed through some of these towns on his way to Waco and had recognized evidence of a Jewish presence there. "I thought I was the only Jew here," he wrote his wife from Marlin, where he had stopped for the night, "but I had not stepped out before I saw the name of Levy, then two ending in 'ski,' watch-makers & jewellers & a Jewish money-lender – verily we are scattered."[38]

Looking for a diversion from such thoughts, de Haas picked up a copy of the *Waco Times-Herald*, where he delighted in a story about the local rabbi, Dr. Berenhard Wohlberg, making "a brilliant, and witty speech at a 'possum and 'tater supper.'"[39] The paper described the event as "a large party of business, professional, traveling and other men" who had gathered as they had the year before to listen to one another give witty toasts and "to feast upon the old southern dish, 'possum and taters.'" Before a group of some 200 of the town's most prominent citizens, Rabbi Wohlberg had addressed "The Moral Effect of the Possum" and received enthusiastic applause for his discussion of that rodent's

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[37] Geffen, 168.
[38] Jacob de Haas to Lillian de Haas (24 December 1902), Jacob de Haas Papers, AJA Microfilm 1336.
[39] Geffen, 168.

progressive social virtues: "P" was for philanthropy, "O" for obedience, "SS" for scientific sanitation, and so on.[40] After reading the account, de Haas noted in his journal that such a thing "seemed so unique, so bizarre from what we consider ordinarily to be Jewish life, and yet," he acknowledged, "I felt that it was all so natural here." De Haas was pleased the next morning to meet Dr. Wohlberg and to learn that he was a Zionist.[41]

That de Haas could describe Wohlberg's participation in the event as both "bizarre" and "natural" illustrates that Texas Jewry lay both at the periphery of Jewish life but also, somehow, at its center. De Haas perceived that Texas Jews were creating something original and distinctly unfamiliar to his more traditional sensibilities, yet something which, in its native context, suited them well. To de Haas, Texas Jewry was unexpected, bemusing, and surprisingly appealing. "How can I help remarking on the adaptability of our people," he asked his diary in Houston. "A grocer riding on horseback in perfect Texan style and a few years ago he was in a Russian slum."[42] Leaving his home in New York, the geographic and spiritual center of American Jewish life, Jacob de Haas had ventured into the frontier, where Jewish identity was less certain and less defined than in the large communites of the North and East. Indeed, Texas Jews, like Rabbi Wohlberg, were aware of their peripheral status and, like the gentile diners at the Possum and Tater Supper, still thought of themselves as frontiersmen. At the same time, their population was growing, their Jewish institutions were developing, and it was

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[40] "U" was for unity and "M" for morality. "'Possum and Tater Feast was a Howling Success," *Waco Daily Times-Herald* (21 December 1904).
[41] Geffen, 168.
[42] Ibid.

easier than ever for Jews to think of Texas as their only home, a spiritual center as legitimate as any proposed by New Yorkers or Zionists. Their connection to Texas was deepening, even while Zionists like de Haas hoped (though perhaps did not truly expect) that they would eventually sever that connection and return to their "real" home in a sovereign Jewish Palestine.

The story of the Rabbi and the Possum reveals many important developments. First, it shows that a major transformation in the meaning of the frontier, both for Jews and gentiles, was underway. No longer a material reality, the frontier was becoming a nostalgic symbol of difference, an internalized marker of identification with an idealized past. Wacos 'Possum and Tater Supper – a social event for the city's professional elite, where bankers, judges, politicians, educators and businessmen gathered in one of the city's finest hotel dining rooms for what the daily paper called "an evening of pleasure, and wholesome amusement" – was clearly not just another professional banquet.[43] The curious menu, "the old southern dish, 'possum and taters,'" elevated the event to the realm of symbolism. In particular, the choice of opossum (and apparently it *was* opossum) was a deliberate and self-conscious gesture, a statement of identity with the Southern frontier – not to mention rural poverty – that was simply no longer the experience of the gentlemen in attendance, if in fact it had ever been. The material frontier, which had dictated the conditions of life for many of their parents, had closed: railroads, telegraphs and telephones, national banking and retail distribution systems, rural mail delivery, and newspapers with national

[43] "'Possum and Tater Feast was a Howling Success," *Waco Daily Times-Herald* (21 December 1904).

circulation had integrated Texas fully into national social, economic and political networks. Moreover, no one could credibly describe Waco, a city of more than 20,000 in 1904, as wild or unsettled, nor were the diners rural or poor.[44] Completely removed from the realities of the actual frontier, the Waco elite revived their sense of themselves as frontiersmen by sitting down to a meal that they would never eat under any other circumstances, a special dish selected and prepared purely for its symbolic value. The 'Possum and Tater Supper was a kind of hazing ritual for wealthy urbanites (the program even included an oyster-eating contest) who secured their membership in Waco's business and professional fraternity by pretending to eat like poor rural folk – that is, like "real" Texans and not like the Eastern elite they had come to resemble.

By joining in the dinner – and partaking of its spectacularly non-kosher menu – Rabbi Wohlberg proved himself a member of that fraternity. Born in Breslau and educated in the *yeshivas* of Europe, Wohlberg was hardly a born frontiersman, but he had served congregations in Canada and in other Southern states, indicating a willingness to venture away from the centers to serve more remote communities. He had been in Waco as the religious leader of Temple Rodef Sholom for two years when Jacob de Haas arrived, and he had won the respect of the city's professional elite, which included many members of his congregation. Wohlberg cultivated a sense of partnership between Jews and gentiles in Waco (his address at the Possum and Tater Supper included a plea for funds to build a Y.M.C.A. building), and his participation in the event reveals the

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[44] "Waco, Tx." The Handbook of Texas Online <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/ WW/hdw1.html> [Accessed 14 September 2001].

degree to which his neighbors accepted him. Their approval, however, depended upon his willingness to internalize (or more properly in this case, to ingest) an imaginary frontier heritage which was not his own. Wohlberg played the role of a Texan as well as his fellow diners, internalizing the frontier and imagining it as a conceptual boundary dividing him from the non-Texan Other.

Similarly, as Texas Jews became more fully integrated into the mainstream of American life, they felt compelled to emphasize their roughness and relative backwardness, the internal frontiers that divided them from other American Jews, and thus they contributed to a lingering perception that Texas Jewry remained grossly underdeveloped.[45] Rabbi George Fox, who spent many years as Fort Worth's spiritual leader, recalled in his memoirs that when he arrived in 1910, "Texas was pretty much an unploughed territory so far as Jewish culture was concerned."[46] The same year, an Orthodox rabbi and scholar from Russia named Alexander Ziskind Gurwitz arrived in San Antonio, which he described as "recently settled, only lately taken from the Mexicans." To Gurwitz's eyes, the city had "a half-wild appearance," seeming "more like some wild-wood" than a civilized town.[47] To make such observations, Gurwitz overlooked the fact that San Antonio was nearly 200 years old in 1910, had been an American city for three quarters of a century, and supported a diverse Jewish population which included, by Gurwitz's own account, "several hundred Orthodox Jewish

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[45] Jacob Rader Marcus described Texas, even as late as World War II, as "a "*loch*," a hole. Hollace Ava Weiner, *Jewish Stars in Texas: Rabbis and Their Work* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1999): xix.
[46] G. George Fox, "The End of an Era," in Stanley F. Chyet, ed., *Lives And Voices: A Collection Of American Jewish Memoirs* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1972): 283.
[47] Gurwitz, 212, 214, 265.

families," two congregations, two kosher butchers, and a Jewish religious school on the way.[48] As in other Texas cities, San Antonio's Jews had worked hard to provide the trappings of Jewish life, at least at a subsistence level, and hoped to expand them further as their numbers increased.

When Zionists like Jacob de Haas arrived, therefore, insisting that Texas Jews should look to Palestine as a place to do the hard work of advancing Jewish civilization, of irrigating fields and erecting buildings, of organizing communities and raising necessary funds, it was easy for Texas Jews to respond that they were already doing it. Their homes and futures were in Texas, and they understood that the contortions they underwent to become Jewish Texans were permanent and even beneficial changes. Wohlberg must have recognized that he was part of that effort, and so he readily engaged in local tradition as his gentile neighbors defined it, however distasteful it might be. His Zionist outlook and religious faith provided him with a spiritual connection to a global Jewish community, but his first loyalty was local, and his activity on behalf of the Zionist cause was more directed toward local community activity and organization than toward a genuine hope for ultimate success. While Jacob de Haas sought the rededication of a Jewish religious and cultural center which would allow Jews at the peripheries, in effect, to return home, Wohlberg, who also claimed to be a Zionist, was part of the ongoing development of a Jewish home at those very peripheries. Thus Texas offered both the fulfillment and the negation of the Zionist impulse: it was a place

[48] Gurwitz, 211, 212, 214.

where Jews had made their homes and founded a homeland, even as they remained aware of themselves as a people in exile.[49]

This paradox found its clearest expression in the early twentieth-century program to control the flow of European immigration and to direct it through Galveston. Between 1907 and 1914, the coastal Texas city served as the portal through which some 10,000 hand-selected European Jews entered the United States and dispersed throughout the Midwest and West. More than simply a port of entry, the city provided a name for the entire effort, which organizers variously described as the Galveston Plan, the Galveston Project and the Galveston Movement. Jacob Schiff, one of the wealthiest and most influential of New York's Jews and the Galveston Movement's founder and financier, went so far as to imagine the entire Trans-Mississippi West as "the Galveston Territory."[50] The Galveston Movement was a new strategy for relocating immigrants to the frontier. Whereas agricultural colonization schemes had sought rural locales for the immigrants they sponsored, Schiff wanted to place immigrants in urban settings where jobs and Jewish neighbors awaited them and where they would provide a core Jewish presence to augment far-flung communities. Whereas Texas's distance from the Jewish communities of the Eastern seaboard had made it unappealing to the supporters of agricultural colonization, its peripheral status gave the Galveston Movement its very reason to exist: Schiff wanted to spread Eastern European Jews over as broad a territory as possible, discouraging their

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[49] Thanks to Professor Robert Abzug for this language.

[50] Quoted, for instance, in Bernard Marinbach, *Galveston: Ellis Island Of The West* (Albany: State University of New York, Press, 1983): 173.

concentration in any single location. Dispersal, he felt, rather than the collection of large Jewish populations in overcrowded ghettoes, offered superior advantages to immigrants, to the nation, and to the Jewish people as a whole.

At bottom, Schiff was looking for a way to rescue the persecuted Jews of Russia, where pogroms and legal restrictions on residence and work were making life dangerous and miserable. According to his biographer, Cyrus Adler, Schiff worried that conditions in Russia "denied to Jews . . . the opportunity to settle upon the soil [and] crowded them into a small section of that vast Empire where they were almost obliged to live upon one another."[51] The United States offered equally vast and open spaces in which Russian Jews could live with greater freedom and ecomomic opportunity, but the doors of immigration had to remain open to them. Schiff worried that the visible crowding of immigrants in urban ghettoes would inspire American officials to close those doors and abandon Russia's Jews to their fate. More precisely, Schiff and his associates feared, in the words of historian Peter Romanofsky, "that the concentrations of impoverished and sometimes politically radical foreigners would lead ultimately to new waves of anti-Semitism," which would in turn result in harsher restrictions on Jewish immigration.[52]

On the whole, Americans had accepted the waves of Eastern European immigrants who began arriving in great numbers after 1880, and Schiff himself wrote that "[w]e certainly cannot complain that our Gentile neighbors and fellow-

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[51] Cyrus Adler, ed., *Jacob H. Schiff: His Life and Letters*, vol. 2 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1928): 113.

[52] Peter Romanofsky, "'. . . To Rid Ourselves of the Burden . . .'": New York Jewish Charities and the Origins of the Industrial Removal Office, 1890-1901," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 64 (June 1975): 331.

citizens in New York or the other large seaport towns, have been intolerant." He recognized, however, that ever-greater numbers of immigrants settling in Northeastern cities could lead to greater hostility toward them. "[C]onditions in New York and, no doubt, elsewhere," he wrote, "are gradually working up to a point where the Gentile population may begin to feel that it should agitate against [continued Jewish immigration], and I am impressed that we must not permit conditions to reach such a point."[53] In Schiff's view, anti-Semitism and immigration restriction were inevitable American reactions to concentrated Jewish populations, and so rescuing Russian Jewry required a program to distribute immigrants throughout the country where they could contribute more actively to the nation's development and blend into the general population. Finally, Schiff was concerned about the personal cost to himself and other New York Jews who, because of the popularity of their city as an immigrant destination, found that they had to "care for almost 75% of all the immigrants who come to the United States."[54] Schiff wished to distribute the financial burden more equitably among America's Jews by distributing the immigrants themselves more equitably.

Schiff's repeated use of the term "the American 'Hinterland'" to describe the region to which he wished to send the immigrants is clearly significant: he

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[53] Jacob Schiff to Mayer Sulzberger (27 September 1906), Galveston Movement Records, AJA Small Collection 3844. Cyrus Adler suggests that anti-Semitism in Russia, "which ultimately would result, if permitted to continue, in the degradation of his co-religionists, and injury to the fair name of the entire race," was a greater motivation for Schiff than any form of American anti-Semitism. Adler, vol. 2, 113.

[54] Jacob Schiff to Simon Wolf (29 December 1890), quoted in Gary Dean Best, "Jacob H. Schiff's Galveston Movement: An Experiment in Immigrant Deflection, 1907-1914," *American Jewish Archives* 30 (April 1978): 43.

even referred to the Movement itself as "the American 'hinterland' project."[55] In Schiff's native German, *hinterland* is literally the land in back of or behind something more prominent, such as a seacoast or a riverway.[56] In this case, Schiff clearly viewed Texas and the "hinterland" it opened into as lying "in back of" New York and, somewhat more figuratively, "behind" it in terms of social and cultural development. The "stream of desirable immigrants" he hoped to send into the West "will be an asset to the growth of the western territory." Besides being "the pick of the transatlantic Jewish migration," they would help to build Western communities since they had "the pioneer spirit."[57] Ensconced in New York society and urban life, Schiff envisioned Texas and the sprawling territory it opened into as a kind of second America, a backward region in need of population and development.[58]

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[55] See, for example, Jacob Schiff to Israel Zangwill (25 October 1906), in Adler, vol. 2, 99; Jacob Schiff to Israel Zangwill (14 January 1907), quoted in Best, 51.

[56] "Hinterland," *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online* <http://www.eb.com:180/bol/topic?eu=41405&sctn=1> [Accessed 29 June 2001]; "Hinterland," *The Compact Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988): 1308.

[57] Jacob Schiff to the manager of the Transcontinental Passenger Association (22 December 1909), in Adler, vol. 2, 105.

[58] Significantly, Schiff visited Galveston only once, four years into the Galveston Movement's operation, preferring to run his end of the operation from New York. Another suggestion of the degree to which Schiff considered Texas, and even the movement he sponsored to direct Jews to it, as wholly peripheral to his own life in New York comes from a 1922 letter to Galveston's Rabbi Cohen from Cyrus Adler, who was at work on a "biographical sketch" of Schiff. Cohen had apparently written to Adler to complain that the sketch ignored the Galveston Movement. "I had always vaguely understood that Mr. Schiff was the Maecenas of the Galveston experiment," Adler responded, "but could never get any definite information. Before writing this sketch, Mrs. Schiff gave me access to a collection of Mr. Schiff's papers in which he had kept record of those matters which he prized most and I found no reference to it. I asked her about the subject and she had no information. I submitted the sketch to both Mr. Schiff's children and likewise asked them to furnish me any additions or corrections and they furnished nothing." Adler acknowledges that perhaps Schiff, "for reasons of his own," kept references to the project out of his papers, but it seems more likely that it was simply not an especially "prized" effort to him. Cyrus Adler to Henry Cohen (6 March 1922), Henry Cohen Papers, CAH, Box 3M239.

Community development, however, was a secondary priority for Schiff: it was more important to broadcast the immigrants as widely as possible, to as many destinations as possible, in order to discourage the further population of current Jewish ghettoes and to prevent the creation of new ones. As such, he offered the Galveston Movement as a direct challenge to radical ideologies of the day which sought to strengthen the centers of Jewish identity – geographical in the case of Zionism and Territorialism, ideological in Bundism, and spiritual in the Yiddishist Movement.[59] Schiff was explicit in his opposition to such movements, especially political Zionism: "[T]he Jew must maintain his own identity," he wrote, "not *apart* in any autonomous body but *among* the nations."[60] Schiff was well aware that his plan would put many immigrants out of reach of Jewish facilities and would discourage traditional religious practice, and he directed his agents in Europe to seek out immigrants who were willing to forgo the daily practices of traditional Judaism, who expressed a willingness to work on Saturdays, and who would commit themselves to complete Americanization.[61] "[W]hen these immigrants once arrive at our shores," he wrote, "they must owe moral allegiance to no one except the United States Government."[62] His goal was to decentralize Judaism geographically and spiritually, to separate the immigrants not only from Jewish population centers but also from traditional Jewish self-identification.

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[59] Marinbach, xiv.
[60] Jacob Schiff to Israel Zangwill (21 November 1905), quoted in Best, 46.
[61] Best, 50. When Israel Zangwill, one of Schiff's most important colleagues in the Galveston Plan, objected that such requirements would lead to "euthanasia of the race and religion," Schiff agreed to relax them. Eli N. Evans, *The Provincials* (New York: Free Press, 1973): 99.
[62] Jacob Schiff to Cyrus L. Sulzberger (3 December 1906), in Adler, vol. 2, 100.

Zionism and the other radical proposals of the time, he believed, offered little but the opportunity to manufacture new physical and spiritual ghettoes.

While it suited his ideological ends perfectly, Schiff was not the first American Jew to think of dispersing Jewish immigrants through the American West. In 1901, the Industrial Removal Office (IRO) had initiated a program to relocate Jews from New York to smaller communities across the country. With help from B'nai B'rith, under the national leadership of Galvestonian Leo N. Levi, the IRO recruited a network of agents in Western towns to supply the organization with information about local job openings. IRO staff then located Jewish workers in Eastern cities who possessed the needed skills and provided them and their families financial assistance to relocate to the new town. The IRO hoped to create Jewish populations in the nation's interior that would be substantial enough to draw subsequent immigrants away from the Eastern centers and into the underdeveloped heartland.

Jacob Schiff had long supported the IRO in its effort to move Jews out of New York, but he saw a difficulty in convincing people who were already settled in Jewish neighborhoods to uproot themselves and relocate to a relatively wild frontier. "After immigrants have once been landed at New York, Boston, Philadelphia, or Baltimore," he explained, "they generally prefer to remain there, and notwithstanding all the efforts of the established removal offices, only a comparatively small number leave these centers." Schiff proposed to divert the flow of immigration altogether, so that immigrants would never see New York or any Eastern city but would arrive in the United States at some point farther west

in "the great American 'Hinterland,' where a constant demand for labor of all kind exists."[63] The outlines of the plan were relatively simple. "What I have in mind," Schiff wrote, is "a project through which it shall become possible to direct the flow of emigration from Russia to the Gulf ports of the United States – notably New Orleans – from where immigrants can readily be distributed over the interior of the country, I am quite certain, in very large numbers." From the Gulf, "railroad lines diverge to the Pacific Coast, to the North and Northwest, as well as to the South and Southwest, which provide easy and cheap transportation to these sections."[64] Through existing IRO channels, organizers could match immigrants with specific destinations on the basis of needed skills or professions. Schiff pledged half a million dollars of his own funds to the plan, which would, he hoped, "suffice to place from 20,000 to 25,000 people in the American 'Hinterland.'" With these in place, "others would readily follow of their own accord, and . . . then a steady stream of immigration will flow through New Orleans and Galveston into the [western] territory."[65]

Schiff's eventual selection of Galveston as the sole port of entry arose primarily from a number of practical concerns. First, since the goal of the plan was to move immigrants into the Trans-Mississippi West, it made little sense to direct them to an East Coast port: the IRO's Morris Waldman, whom Schiff assigned to scout out a suitable entry point, observed that "New Orleans or

[63] Jacob Schiff to Israel Zangwill (24 August 1906), in Adler, vol. 2, 97.
[64] Ibid, 98.
[65] Jacob Schiff to Israel Zangwill (25 October 1906), in Adler, vol. 2, 99.

Galveston is nearer Nevada."[66] Eastern cities already possessed crowded Jewish neighborhoods where immigrants might be inclined to stay, and Schiff and Waldman both expressed concern about the prohibitive cost of cross-country transport from ports in the Southeastern states.[67] It seemed wise, therefore, to bring immigrants into the country at a point as far west as possible. The Panama Canal was underway but incomplete, making West Coast ports impracticable, so Schiff looked to the Gulf of Mexico. Initially considering New Orleans the best alternative there, Schiff soon concluded that Galveston, which offered similar rail connections to all parts of the country, would be a better choice since it also received regular passenger service from Bremen, Germany, on the North German Lloyd Line. Finally, as historian Gary Dean Best explains, Galveston had a decisive advantage over New Orleans: it was "a city sufficiently small that it would not likely attract immigrants to settle there permanently in preference to those locations arranged for them by the removal office."[68] That is, in comparison to New Orleans, which was a large, dynamic and cosmopolitan city with a growing Russian Jewish population, Galveston was small, provincial and, as Rabbi Cohen observed, "scarcely touched by the newer immigrants."[69] Galveston was connected enough to offer the practical considerations necessary to

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66 Morris Waldman to David Bressler (5 November 1906), Jewish Immigration Bureau, Galveston Immigration Plan Records, Record Group #I-90, American Jewish Historical Society, Box 2, Folder 31.

67 Jacob Schiff to Israel Zangwill (24 August 1906), in Adler, vol. 2, 97-98; Waldman to Bressler (5 November 1906).

68 Best, 49.

69 Henry Cohen, "The Galveston Immigration Movement," *Jewish Herald* (5 February 1909), reprinted from *B'nai B'rith Messenger* (16 April 1909) and also reprinted as "The Galveston Movement: Its First Year," *Western States Jewish History* 18 (January 1986): 114-119.

the strategy and yet peripheral enough not to pose the risk of becoming a Jewish center in its own right.

With such considerations tilting the balance, the hurricane that had struck Galveston only a few years before, in 1900, probably influenced Schiff's preference, though he never said so explicitly. The storm destroyed most of the downtown property, and by 1906, when Jacob Schiff was making his decision, community leaders, including city treasurer Ike Kempner, had committed themselves to the monumental engineering task of raising the city upon more than 16 million cubic yards of sand and surrounding it with a massive seawall to protect it from future storms. The project took years, during which residents endured the noise, dust and inconvenience of pumps, canals, sludge, and catwalks.[70] While these projects boded well for the city's future and attested to the resiliency of its residents in the wake of the worst natural disaster in American history, they did not make the island an appealing place to live during the years they were underway. Jewish immigrants, presumably, would be more than willing to escape to their futures in other American towns.

As the outlines of his plan were taking shape, Schiff was busy locating assistance and resources. To run the European end of the project, he recruited Israel Zangwill of the Jewish Territorial Organization (ITO), a society with offices in London and Kiev dedicated to securing a territory somewhere in the

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[70] For details on the storm and the subsequent rebuilding campaign, see Michael A. Smith, "Post-storm rebuilding considered 'Galveston's finest hour,' *The 1900 Storm: Galveston Island, Texas* <http://www.1900storm.com/ rebuilding/index.lasso> [Accessed 29 June 2001); David G. McComb, *Galveston: A History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986); Erik Larson, *Isaac's Storm: a Man, a Time, and the Deadliest Hurricane in History* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1999); and Hyman, 132-172.

world (exclusive of Palestine, which Zangwill believed was too firmly in Muslim hands to be recovered) to convert into an autonomous Jewish state. While Schiff's plan to disperse Russia's Jews throughout the United States clearly ran counter to the ITO's mission, he nevertheless convinced Zangwill to join his Galveston effort, pointing out that unlike Zangwill's abstract long-term hopes, Schiff's was an "immediately practicable" response to the "existing emergency" in Russia.[71] The ITO was to work in alliance with the German *Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden*, which facilitated the emigration of German Jews, "to father the movement in Russia, to gather the proposed emigrants [in Germany], to arrange steamship routes, etc." The money for such an operation would have to come from European organizations, since American law prohibited the encouragement of immigration, but Schiff assured Zangwill that his organization would see to the immigrants' needs once they arrived in Galveston.[72]

To that end, Schiff directed the establishment in Galveston of the Jewish Immigrants' Information Bureau (JIIB), and he assigned Morris Waldman, formerly of the IRO, to run it. Waldman arrived in Texas in the fall of 1906 with a letter of introduction from Schiff to Rabbi Henry Cohen, a childhood friend of Israel Zangwill, who eagerly agreed to work closely with the JIIB, serve as their liaison to the Jews of Galveston, meet the arriving boats himself, and see personally to the welfare of the immigrants. Cohen, a lifelong opponent of Zionism, shared Schiff's commitment to dispersing immigrants broadly over the nation's interior: "[T]his country could," he wrote, "without the least violence to

[71] Jacob Schiff to Israel Zangwill (24 August 1906), in Adler, vol. 2, 97.
[72] Jacob Schiff to Israel Zangwill (25 October 1906), in Adler, vol. 2, 99.

itself, assimilate the world's Jewish population and then have room for three times that number, exclusive of the regular quota of other foreign settlers."[73] Nor was volunteerism out of character for the rabbi, whom generations of Texas Jews would remember as a kind of folk hero: he is reported to have carried a pistol in his back pocket to help protect the citizenry in the aftermath of the 1900 hurricane; to have rushed into a Galveston brothel to retrieve fallen Jewish women; and to have pestered Presidents on behalf of unfairly condemned prisoners.[74] Cohen was English by birth and education, and he had held pulpits in Jamaica and Mississippi before accepting the leadership of Galveston's Temple B'nai Israel in 1888. In the sixty-two years he served there, he became one of the city's most prominent and beloved citizens, renowned for his compassion, intelligence, and willingness to help anyone in need, regardless of their religious affiliation. In 1984, more than thirty years after Cohen's death, he was the only religious leader to appear on a list compiled by the Texas State Historical Association of the "most important Texans of all time."[75] While Cohen biographies are a rich mixture of fact, legend and memoir, there is no doubt that

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[73] Cohen, "The Galveston Immigration Movement."

[74] According to members of Cohen's family, an anonymous Galvestonian gave the rabbi a pistol after the storm "just in case" he should need it: "Already there're a bunch of bums going through the city," he said, "stealing jewelry off the dead, taking over everything they can get their hands on." Nathan and Cohen, 138. In his 1953 Cohen obituary, Jacob Rader Marcus reported that "with others" Cohen "patrolled the streets with a shotgun to preserve law and order" in the aftermath of the storm. Jacob Rader Marcus, "Henry Cohen (1863-1952)," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 42 (June 1953): 451. Time seems to have enlarged both the story and the rabbi's weapon.

[75] Sandra L. Myres, "Cowboys and Southern Belles," in Robert O'Connor, ed.. *Texas Myths* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1986): 124.

he played a crucial role in forming and leading Texas Jewry in the early twentieth century. [76]

Rabbi Cohen began his active duties for the JIIB by meeting the first boat, the *S.S. Cassel*, which arrived in Galveston from Bremen on July 1, 1907, carrying sixty Jewish immigrants for the Bureau to guide through the entry process and send on their way to inland cities. That was to be a complex task, as Cohen later described. After passing the government's medical and customs inspections, immigrants and their baggage were transported "in large wagons" to the JIIB office half a mile away. There they were treated to a flurry of activity:

> Then the distribution of mail long looked for by the aliens, the refreshing bath and the wholesome and generous meal; the facilities for writing home and for reading Yiddish papers published since the passengers' embarkation; the questioning of the individuals and the inspection of the consignee's record by the office management; the selection of localities according to the requisitions of the interior agents, and the purchasing of railroad tickets; and then, supper; the apportionment of food sufficient to last each immigrant for the whole up-country journey and a little longer; then the baggage wagons for the neighboring depot, and the departure from the bureau of those who are to leave on the night trains, the checking of baggage to destinations, and the leave-taking from one another after a month's constant companionship often pathetic; the comfortable placing of the travelers in the railroad coaches by the bureau's employees, then telegrams to the interior committees notifying them of the departure of their allotment, so that the latter should be met at the station; the retiring of the remainder to bed (what a change from the steerage bunks!) to leave on the morrow or thereafter, according to circumstances – all this and more must be seen to be realised.[77]

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[76] For details on Rabbi Cohen, including many oft-recounted tales from his life, see Nathan and Cohen; A. Stanley Dreyfus, *Henry Cohen: Messenger of the Lord* (Bloch Publishing, 1963); Jimmy Kessler, *Henry Cohen: the Life of a Frontier Rabbi* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1997); Henry Cohen [the rabbi's grandson], "Henry Cohen of Galveston Reconsidered," AJA Biographies File; Webb Waldron, "Rabbi Cohen – 'First Citizen of Texas,'" *Reader's Digest* 34 (February 1939): 97-100; Marguerite Meyer Marks, "Memories of Rabbi Henry Cohen As I Knew Him," *Western States Jewish History* 18 (January 1986): 120-125; Marcus, "Henry Cohen (1863-1952)."

[77] Henry Cohen, "The Galveston Immigration Movement."

Throughout this cumbersome process, repeated dozens of times during the life of the Galveston Movement, Cohen served as interpreter, facilitator, and chief comforter to the immigrants, many of whom were naturally frightened by the unfamiliar experience. Alexander Gurwitz, who arrived in Galveston from Russia in 1910, remembered Rabbi Cohen as one of the few high points of an otherwise grueling voyage. Cohen offered Gurwitz the opportunity to eat in a kosher restaurant, for which the Orthodox rabbi was deeply grateful, and Gurwitz observed "that he was equally considerate of all the immigrants, with gently reassuring words." Ensuring that they were comfortably fed and lodged, Cohen "was as a compassionate father to all of the poor, lonely immigrants." If the paid professionals in the organization had been as responsible, Gurwitz wrote, "the immigrants would not have suffered even a fraction of what they had to bear, both in getting to this country and in being settled here."[78] Cohen's colleague, Rabbi Henry Barnston of Houston, remarked that Cohen was largely responsible for the success of the Galveston Movement at the Texas end. "He was always at the beck and call of the immigrant," Barnston told the *American Israelite*, "ever ready to plead his cause and fight his battles, always on hand to soothe, advise, encourage and welcome."[79] Even years after their departure from Galveston, many immigrants wrote to Cohen to thank him for helping them in their first days in America.[80]

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[78] Gurwitz, vol. 2, 208.
[79] *American Israelite* (3 September 1914), reprinted in *Western States Jewish History* 18 (January 1986): 114.
[80] Many of these letters are included in the Henry Cohen Papers, CAH.

As Jewish immigrants began arriving in their city, gentile Galvestonians reacted with warmth and hospitality. Mayor H.A. Landes of Galveston appeared on the dock to welcome the *Cassel* and the first group of Schiff's immigrants, asking Rabbi Cohen to translate into Yiddish his personal welcome to Galveston and to America. One of the immigrants, in a response frequently recounted in support of the Galveston Movement, stepped forward and thanked the mayor in awkward English. "We are overwhelmed," he said, "that the ruler of the city should greet us. We have never been spoken to by the officials of our country except in terms of harshness, and although we have heard of the great land of freedom, it is very hard to realize that we are permitted to grasp the hand of the great man." He then promised, on behalf of the entire group of immigrants, that they would try to be good citizens.[81]

The immigrants' apparent willingness to join fully into American life, to claim the United States as their home, almost certainly helped to win the support of gentile newspaper editors, who Rabbi Cohen said were "vying with one another in their enthusiasm" for the Movement.[82] Texas newspaper editors saw direct immigration as a boon to the state, and they saw the immigrants as acceptable, even desirable new Texans. In its report of the first arrival of the *Cassel*, the *Galveston Times* noted that the immigrants were "an intelligent, hard

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[81] "Jewish Immigrants," *Galveston Times* (2 July 1907). This incident has been recounted many times, and the immigrant's words have been made more dramatic in each retelling. According to Cohen himself, the immigrant's speech was as follows: [I]n the country which we come from this scene could not happen. The mayor in the town which we have left would not greet us. . . . You have clasped our hands. A time may come when your country will need us; we will not hesitate to serve you with our blood." The other immigrants, in this account, responded with "a resounding hurrah!" Cohen, "The Galveston Immigration Movement."

[82] Cohen, "The Galveston Immigration Movement."

working class of people, who hope by hard work and a law abiding life to found homes in our country where they can live happily."[83] A year later, the *Houston Post* offered its support, observing that Jews were an "industrious and law-abiding population" who were welcome in a growing state. At the same time, the *Post* claimed that Texas had much to offer the immigrants: "Texas has room within her borders for all the Israelites in the world, and then some," the editor wrote. "Those who are interested in the scheme for Jewish colonization would do well to bear that fact in mind."[84]

Many Jewish Texans also recognized the potential economic benefits of the influx and offered their support to the Movement. While directing his family's business interests in cotton and other investments, Ike Kempner also served as Galveston city treasurer, was deeply involved in rebuilding the island after the hurricane, and was later elected mayor. Like his father, he saw that business success depended upon the city's general prosperity, and he worked assiduously throughout his life on behalf of both. As "a civic booster and businessman," according to biographer Harold Hyman, Kempner "welcomed newcomers and their dispersion on the mainland. . . . This increased traffic through the port and the resulting enlarged consumer demand would encourage a larger permanent Island City population and more imports, all to Galveston's benefit."[85] He actively supported the Galveston Movement through a "web of

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[83] "Jewish Immigrants," *Galveston Times* (2 July 1907).
[84] *Houston Post*, reprinted as "Texas Has Room," *Jewish Herald* (24 September 1908). The *Herald* was actually reprinting an article from the *Hebrew Standard* which had, in turn, quoted the article from the *Post*.
[85] Hyman, 231-32.

public and private associations . . . and the boards of the temple and several hospitals," a network that provided "precisely the kind of in-place service structure with links to governments' resources that the Movement's backers needed." As city treasurer, Kempner was also a powerful fundraiser for the Movement's Texas operations.[86]

Other Texas Jews supported the Movement for the same ideological reasons that motivated Jacob Schiff: they saw it as a way of challenging the Zionist impulse they found so contrary to the gains Jews had made in America and to the opportunities for growth that still existed in smaller American communities. In a typical statement titled "Come to Texas," *Jewish Herald* editorialist Oscar Leonard outlined the argument in favor of the Galveston Movement, explicitly offering Texas as a more suitable site for Jewish development than the Palestinian Zion. "The crowding of many Jewish families in one small space like the New York East Side," Leonard wrote, "brings a problem with it. What then is the remedy?" Zionists, Leonard explained, recommended colonization in Palestine, but "why not in the large state of Texas where the soil goes a begging for cultivators?" He acknowledged that many Jews would prefer not to be farmers, but "this is not a sufficient reason why they should be crowded into ugly, unwholesome tenements in large cities" when states like Texas, with a wealth of smaller towns, waited "for willing hands and alert minds to help it develop."[87] Similarly, a 1912 *Herald* editorial argued that the Galveston Movement "points the way to a sane and just settlement of the vexed question of

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[86] Hyman, 241.
[87] Oscar Leonard, "Come to Texas," *Jewish Herald* (6 January 1910).

Jewish immigration" by sending immigrants into "the great regions of the South and West [where there] are many communities, and more will spring up, that need the pushful energy of the Jew."[88] Once again, non-Zionists marshaled rhetoric about the benefits of Texas to demonstrate that continued dispersion, rather than the collection of population in Jewish centers, was the answer to Jewish hopes.

Despite these advantages, not all Texas Jews were immediately supportive of the Galveston Movement, though few quibbled with its ideology or goals. Ike Kempner observed that Texas Jews in general expressed a "lack of deep interest in . . . national Jewish charities," an insularity and parochialism that made it hard for him to obtain their support for the Movement or for other national and international Jewish causes.[89] At the same time, many feared that they might become responsible for the support of immigrants who could not or would not find work. Schiff had promised Rabbi Cohen that the JIIB would do its best to limit the Galveston program only to those "sturdy" immigrants who were "capable of becoming promptly self-supporting," but as the boats continued arriving and rumors began to spread of immigrants reaching their destinations without the promised skills, questions began to arise.[90] If immigrants were unemployable, a Waco merchant warned Rabbi Cohen, "the hardship will fall on Galveston and on all Jewish Texans."[91] Texas had much to offer the immigrants, the *Jewish Herald* observed, but only if the immigrants were prepared to give

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[88] "The Galveston Movement," *Jewish Herald* (24 October 1912).
[89] Hyman, 242.
[90] Jacob Schiff to Henry Cohen (8 January 1907), Henry Cohen Papers, AJA Manuscript Collection 263.
[91] Quoted in Hyman, 243.

something back. "There is more room for the Jew in Texas than any other state in the Union," wrote an editorialist, "but the immigrant can't live on room. There is absolutely no difficulty to find work *for those having occupations*."[92]

Jews in Galveston, who stood to carry the heaviest burden if the JIIB deposited unemployable immigrants at their doorsteps and then neglected them, were especially suspicious of Schiff's plans and insisted on assurances that Galveston would not become another Jewish ghetto. Needing their support, Schiff stressed that the JIIB's primary goal was to pass the immigrants through the port, onto the railroads, and to their designated out-of-state destinations as swiftly as possible. Indeed, when enlisting Rabbi Cohen's help, Schiff was careful to explain that "it is not intended to permit arriving immigrants to remain in the seaport towns, but to promptly send them on to their destination to the North and West of the Gulf ports."[93] Galveston was to remain a port of entry only, not a destination.

To this end, Morris Waldman of the JIIB in Galveston and his colleague David Bressler, who directed the Movement's office in New York, urged ITO recruiters in Russia to downplay Galveston and even Texas as a whole as desirable destinations. In the first months of the program, Bressler asked Zangwill "not to emphasize Texas and especially Galveston, in fact to say that Galveston offers no opportunity for the immigrant."[94] Morris Waldman also

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[92] *Jewish Herald* (10 February 1910). Emphasis added.
[93] Jacob Schiff to Henry Cohen (8 January 1907), Henry Cohen Papers, AJA Manuscript Collection 263.
[94] David Bressler to Israel Zangwill (7 October 1907), Jewish Territorial Organization (ITO) Papers A36/95, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem, quoted in Marinbach, 23.

wrote to Zangwill to explain that "[Texas] cities and the whole state of Texas offer only limited opportunities for a small minority of our people." Because the opportunities were greater in other states, Zangwill's groups should "say that Galveston is being used by us *only as a port of entry*, that none of the immigrants will remain here."[95] Indeed, the entire complement of immigrants from the first two boats to arrive in Galveston was directed straight through Texas to other states, and in the whole course of the program fewer than 300 of the 10,000 total immigrants remained in Galveston itself; most of those were either reuniting with family who already lived there or had sought the JIIB's help after traveling to Galveston on their own.[96]

Notwithstanding the concerns of their brethren in Galveston, Jews in other Texas cities recognized in the Movement an opportunity to augment their numbers and to bring a needed infusion of new blood into their communities. Here the wishes of community leaders were clearly at odds with Schiff's goals: while he wanted to disperse the immigrants into as many towns as possible so as to prevent their accumulation in conspicuous Jewish centers, local leaders wanted exactly such an accumulation in their own communities. Civic leaders in Texas pressed the JIIB to send them their fair share of the immigrants, and the Bureau relented. Only a month after telling Zangwill "not to emphasize Texas and especially Galveston," David Bressler wrote again to say that the office had "added several cities in the State of Texas" to its list of available destinations and

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[95] Waldman's handwritten comments on pamphlet published by "ITO Central Emigration Bureau for all of Russia in Kiev" (1907), quoted in Marinbach, Photoplate 20.
[96] Marinbach, 23; "Statistics of Jewish Immigrants Who Arrived at the Port of Galveston, Texas During the Years 1907-1913 inclusive, handled by Jewish Immigrants' Information Bureau of Galveston, Texas," 11, Henry Cohen Papers, AJA Manuscript Collection 263.

that "while we wish special stress laid on the fact that Galveston itself offers no opportunity for the immigrant, the State of Texas is otherwise not barren of opportunities for the newcomer."[97]

Once they had clarified their desire to receive Galveston immigrants, Texas cities and towns became popular destinations: when all was said and done, in fact, Texas retained more of the Galveston immigrants than any other state. According to a 1913 report (produced before statistics were available for the Movement's final year), organizers had overseen the relocation of 2,144 people in Texas – fully 25% of the program's total (See Table 3). Most of these were direct placements to 56 communities which received anywhere from 1 to 182 immigrants each; Houston, Dallas, and Fort Worth received the greatest number. In addition, the JIIB provided support for hundreds of "courtesy" and "reunion" cases, individuals traveling to Texas either on their own outside the ITO's recruitment efforts or to reunite with family members already in Texas. These additions not only swelled the numbers of the largest communities but took Jews to tiny towns like Eagle Lake, Humble, and Pecos that organizers had not originally contemplated (See Table 4).[98]

In 1914, Jacob Schiff called a sudden halt to the Galveston Movement's operations and discontinued its funding. Logistical and political problems both within and outside the organization had plagued it from the beginning, and Schiff finally wearied of the effort. His colleagues in Europe and America had

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[97] David Bressler to Clement I. Salaman (20 November 1907), ITO Papers A36/95, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem, quoted in Marinbach, 23.
[98] "Statistics of Jewish Immigrants . . ." Henry Cohen Papers, AJA Manuscript Collection 263.

Table 3. Distribution of Galveston Movement Immigrants by State, 1907-1913.

State	Direct	Reunion	Courtesy*	Total
Texas	1159	378	607	2144**
Iowa	1138	72	15	1225
Missouri	781	200	118	1099
Minnesota	922	50	25	997
Nebraska	505	81	55	541
California	69	32	249	349
Louisiana	189	51	56	296
Colorado	171	8	105	284
Illinois	242	36	5	283
Oklahoma	200	26	19	245
Kansas	178	26	4	208
Tennessee	165	20	6	191
Arkansas	149	3	3	155
Wisconsin	48	0	0	48
Mississippi	30	1	4	35
North Dakota	31	4	0	35
Michigan	26	0	0	26
Georgia	25	0	0	25
Ohio	19	0	0	19
Oregon	12	7	0	19
Utah	7	8	4	19
Kentucky	17	0	0	17
Washington	15	0	0	15
Arizona	8	0	0	8
Alabama	4	0	2	6
Connecticut	1	0	4	5
New York	0	0	4	4
Indiana	2	0	0	2
Masachusetts	0	0	2	2
New Mexico	0	1	1	2
Nevada	2	0	0	2
Rhode Island	0	0	1	1
Totals	**6115**	**1004**	**1288**	**8407**

Source: "Statistics of Jewish Immigrants Who Arrived at the Port of Galveston, Texas, During the Years 1907-1913, Inclusive, Handled by 'Jewish Immigrants' Information Bureau' of Galveston, Texas," Henry Cohen Papers, AJA Manuscript Collection 263.

* Direct Removals were those arranged and facilitated by the JIIB and their European partners. Reunion cases were immigrants whom the JIIB helped to reunite with family members the Bureau had already placed. Courtesy cases were individuals who arrived in Galveston on their own, often as a consequence of JIIB advertising in Europe, who received settlement assistance from the JIIB.

** I have corrected a typographical error in the original source that listed this figure as 2,134: this correction is based on the specific numbers given here and in the city breakdown, reproduced in Table 4.

struggled throughout the Movement's existence to quash rumors, spread in part by Zionists and Jewish socialists in Russia and New York, that the Galveston immigrants were to be put to work as forced labor or prostitutes, charges that dampened the enthusiasm of potential immigrants.[99] In addition, American law, which forbid the encouragement of immigration, presented an intractable challenge. Schiff and his colleagues had scrupulously assisted only those immigrants who arrived of their own volition, offering Galveston as an alternate destination for those who were already planning to emigrate. Federal customs officials, however, neglected to draw such a distinction and presumed that the JIIB provided inducements to European immigrants who might have stayed home otherwise. These charges, along with persistent unfounded rumors that white slavers in Europe and America were using the Galveston Movement as a way to import Jewish prostitutes, led to an unusual zealousness on the part of U.S. customs officials at the Galveston port, who applied the strictest possible standards to the incoming immigrants and sent many of them back to Europe.[100] Between 1907 and 1913, for example, customs officials in Galveston deported

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[99] See, for example, an anti-Galveston Movement article in the *Jewish Daily Forward* and the request by J. Jochelman of the German *Hilfsverein* to Morris Waldman to explain the situation so "that we might be able to protest most strongly against those insinuations." J. Jochelman to Morris Waldman (23 October 1907), AJA Small Collection 3845. For details on the charges against the Galveston Movement, especially as they relate to business and social conditions in Galveston, see Hyman 244-48. According to Hyman, the Kempner family's practice of using prison labor in their sugar operations gave credence in some circles to the rumor that the Galveston Movement, which the Kempners actively supported, was to be a source of similar labor.
[100] For details on the conflict between U.S. customs officials and the leaders of the Galveston Movement and other immigration schemes, see Esther Panitz, "In Defense of the Jewish Immigrant (1891-1924)," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 55 (September 1965): 57-97.

Table 4. Distribution of Galveston Movement Immigrants in Texas by City, 1907-1913.

City*	Direct	Reunion	Courtesy*	Total
Anderson	1	0	0	1
Amarillo	3	0	0	3
Austin	9	6	2	17
Beaumont	32	8	3	42
Beeville	1	0	0	1
Bermont	0	0	1	1
Bryan	6	0	4	10
Brownwood	1	0	0	1
Calvert	17	0	2	19
Corsicana	19	0	0	19
Corpus Christi	5	3	1	9
Cleburne	72	8	2	82
Dallas	175	55	113	343
Denison	12	2	2	16
Denton	2	0	0	2
Dickinson	2	0	0	2
Dublin	6	3	0	9
Eagle Lake	0	3	0	3
El Paso	10	0	20	30
Ennis	2	0	0	2
Franklin	0	0	1	1
Fort Worth	158	50	55	263
Gatesville	1	2	0	3
Gainesville	7	0	2	9
Galveston	120	84	83	287
Gilmer	1	0	0	1
Gonzales	1	0	0	1
Hallettsville	3	0	0	3
Hamilton	4	1	0	5
Hempstead	1	0	0	1
Houston	182	72	138	392
Hockley	1	0	0	1
Humble	0	0	1	1
Kenedy	1	0	0	1
LaGrange	0	0	1	1
Laredo	3	0	4	7
Liberty	2	0	0	2
Lockhart	0	0	1	1
Luling	1	0	5	6
Marquez	0	0	1	1
Marshall	23	23	0	46
McKinney	0	0	2	2
Mingus	2	0	0	2
Nacona	1	0	0	1
Nacogdoches	0	0	1	1

Table 4. Distribution of Galveston Movement Immigrants in Texas by City, 1907-1913, cont.

City	Direct	Reunion	Courtesy	Total
Navasota	4	0	0	4
Palestine	16	1	1	18
Pecos	0	0	2	2
Pierce	2	0	0	2
Port Arthur	10	1	2	13
Richmond	0	0	2	2
Rosenberg	1	0	0	1
San Antonio	108	16	60	184
San Marcos	3	0	7	10
Seguin	1	0	3	4
Silsbee	0	0	2	2
Temple	1	0	0	1
Texarkana	51	0	7	58
Tyler	29	4	17	50
Taylor	1	0	0	1
Teague	2	0	0	2
Texas City	1	0	8	9
Terrell	1	0	0	1
Waco	73	16	28	117
Weimar	1	0	1	2
Wichita Falls	0	0	2	2
Wharton	5	3	20	28
Victoria	12	0	17	29
Yoakum	9	0	0	9
Totals	**1159**	**378**	**607**	**2144**

Source: "Statistics of Jewish Immigrants Who Arrived at the Port of Galveston, Texas, During the Years 1907-1913, Inclusive, Handled by 'Jewish Immigrants' Information Bureau' of Galveston, Texas," Henry Cohen Papers, AJA Manuscript Collection 263.

[*] I have corrected the typographical errors in the spelling of several of these towns, but I could not locate two, Bermont and Nacona, on current maps of Texas.

a large number of female Jewish immigrants, claiming that they were "morally defective" – more than four times the number deported by their colleagues in New York.[101] In the end, the advent of World War I, which resulted in harsh restrictions on passenger travel and limited all transatlantic shipping, dealt a final blow to the Galveston Movement.

[101] Hyman, 246.

In its seven years of operation, the Galveston Movement succeeded in placing some 10,000 Russian Jews into more than 200 communities across the nation, especially in the West where, as Schiff had hoped, they began to attract others. On the whole, however, the results were disappointing to the Movement's leaders. As Bernard Marinbach has pointed out, the number of Galveston immigrants never constituted even 4% of the total Jewish immigration to the U.S. in the years of the Movement's operation. Despite Schiff's initial goal of redirecting the entire stream of Jewish immigration into Texas, actual arrivals in Galveston increased negligibly.[102]

Schiff offered a number of explanations for the Galveston Movement's failure – especially the length and hardship of the Galveston voyage and the stringency and inconsistent enforcement of U.S. immigration laws – but historian Marinbach suggests a deeper problem "of which Schiff was, perhaps, unaware." Despite the philanthropist's best efforts to offer "the great American hinterland" as a suitable place for Jewish settlement, his own advertising reminded potential immigrants of the severe hardships they would face there. By ordering his recruiters to give preference to "young, skilled, able-bodied men who were willing to work at anything, and even on the Sabbath," Schiff helped "to foster the popular impression that the 'Galveston Territory' was a spiritual wasteland which promised little but a hard life." Marinbach argues that the Galveston Movement, if anything, proved that "the masses would always be attracted to New York and other well-established centers of Jewish life in the United States."[103] The

[102] Marinbach, 173.
[103] Ibid.

relatively small number of Jewish immigrants who saw in Texas and the rest of the "Galveston Territory" the kind of opportunities that the Movement's advocates described bears out this interpretation: whatever golden promises the Movement's supporters made, the impression remained that a wilderness, however free and secure, was no place for a dedicated Jew to live.

The irony, of course, is that Texas supporters of the Galveston Movement helped to emphasize the frontier qualities that, in hindsight, were detrimental to its success. Texas offered distance from urban centers, and the relative freedom that came with it. Texas also offered economic opportunity in a smaller, less competitive setting than New York or other Eastern cities. In Texas one had a chance to distinguish oneself from Jews at the center, to adapt to a different environment, to become a different kind of Jewish American than those in larger communities. But these were not necessarily things that the immigrants themselves wanted. For those seeking a rich Jewish life, facilities in the West remained woefully inadequate; for them Texas could never be a true Jewish homeland.

Alexander Gurwitz, an Orthodox Jew from Russia who spent more than twenty years in San Antonio as a kosher butcher and Hebrew teacher, commented in his memoirs (written in Yiddish) on the advantages Texas could and could not provide for the religiously minded immigrant. "The lot of our people brings us far more changes in our state of being than other peoples," he wrote. "This is largely because our Jewish people is not rooted in a firm place of our own. We do not have a country of our own, with our own government, as other nations do."

Gurwitz counted himself lucky to live "under a democratic government, which does not distinguish between Jews and non-Jews," but ultimately Texas, which had provided a good home, could never be a homeland. "[T]he newcomers did not come here seeking Judaism," he observed. "That they had in their old home. They came to seek a livelihood." And the more they worked toward economic security, the more they sacrificed Jewish tradition: "neglect of the sanctity of the Sabbath and Festivals, gradual ignoring of sacred Jewish laws and customs, dereliction in providing a decent Jewish education for children."[104]

Whatever advantages Texas had provided for Gurwitz and his family – and he expressed his gratitude continually in his memoir – it could never provide what a sovereign Jewish state in Palestine could provide, and the lackluster religious practice he observed among San Antonio's Jews could never replace the full, genuine tradition he had known in Europe. Gurwitz himself compromised his beliefs only as much as he had to in order to survive. He never stopped being the devout Jew that he had always been: he was, as Seth Wolitz has described him, "an accommodating essentialist," living in Texas but not at home there.[105] It seems natural, then, that in 1917 he welcomed the Balfour Declaration – in which the British government promised to establish a Jewish state in Palestine if they won it from the Turks in World War I – as a "mystical balm" that "quickened the spirit of Jewry." Suddenly, he wrote, "there was the feeling that the long yearned for end to Jewish dispersion had begun" and that the Jews "were about to be re-

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[104] Gurwitz, vol. 2, 249-251.

[105] Seth L. Wolitz, "Bifocality in Jewish Identity in the Texas-Jewish Experience," in *Jewries at the Frontier: Accommodation, Identity, Conflict*, ed. Sander L. Gilman and Milton Shain (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999): 195.

settled in their own land, in the Fatherland called '*Eretz Yisrael*,' the Land of Israel."[106] While residing in Texas, Gurwitz always looked beyond it, beyond America, toward a Jewish future elsewhere.

With the issuance of the Balfour Declaration, the Zionist movement received an impetus that would carry it to success. Membership in the Texas Zionist Organization (TZO), formed in Houston in 1905, grew as a result. The TZO met in annual state conventions in the years after the Balfour Declaration to discuss ways of spreading the Zionist message through Texas and supporting the cause of a Jewish state. They did so, however, with an expressed desire to remain Americans, to turn the advantages of American society into a tool for advocating Zionism. In 1909, at the TZO's fifth state convention, Louis Freed, a founding officer of the group, clarified the group's position on the conflict between Jewish and American national loyalties:

> The old reform school coming to us from Germany about the middle of the last century intoxicated with emancipation, bringing that compromising, apologizing spirit, imitating everything except that which is Jewish, is passing away. The Maccabean Jew is taking his place. To Zionism and the true spirit of Americanism alone can this change be attributed, for in no country as in America can the Jew exert his full powers for the good of his people.[107]

Freed briefly catalogued the failed attempts to solve "the vexatious Jewish question," including Israel Zangwill's Jewish Territorial Organization and "distribution via Galveston, which dwindled into a farce."[108] For Freed, only Palestine offered real hope for the Jewish future, and the achievement of a Jewish

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[106] Gurwitz, vol. 2, 253.
[107] Louis Freed, "We have assembled again," 4, TJHS Box 3A174, Folder 3.
[108] Ibid.

state there depended upon the freedoms that America had provided. Texas, then, was only a temporary haven for the Jews who lived there, but one where they could perform the work that would secure a better future elsewhere.

Freed and Gurwitz were in the minority in Texas, where non-Zionism remained the norm, especially among the old-guard Reform leadership. An observer in Galveston remembered seeing Henry Cohen in 1917, fifty-two years old, just over five feet tall, climbing to the roof of the city's Y.M.C.A. building to tear down the Zionist flag flying there in honor of the Balfour Declaration.[109] On another occasion, Mayor Ike Kempner refused to permit the Star of David to fly over City Hall to mark "some celebration in Palestine": "I took the position," he remembered, "that only the Texas flag and the flag of the United States had flown or should be flown from our City Hall."[110] These acts of defiance were small but symbolic: Cohen and Kempner remained steadfast non-Zionists throughout their lives, and anti-Zionist sentiment remained strong among many Texas Jews well into the 1940s. But times were changing: Kempner lost his bid for re-election in 1919 and claimed later that "[i]f there is such a thing as an orthodox Jewish vote, it was in this election effectively invoked against me and contributed to defeating my aspiration . . . for a second term as mayor."[111] For most Texas Jews, Texas itself was an acceptable, even preferable Zion, but developments elsewhere in the United States and in the world were making it a very different place than it had

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[109] Abram L. Geller to *Jewish Press* (Fort Worth) (13 August 1980), TJHS Box 3A171, Folder 3.
[110] I. H. Kempner, *Recalled Recollections* (Dallas: Egan Press, 1961): 58.
[111] Ibid.

been. In succeeding decades Texas Jews would continually have to renegotiate the boundaries that defined them and set them apart from other Jews.

Chapter 4. "Texas News for Texas Jews"

Oscar Handlin, the pioneering historian of America's immigrants, wrote that the waves of migration to the United States in the early nineteenth century began when European "younger sons," those to whom the laws of primogeniture had denied an inheritance, "learned with hope that the portions which at home would not buy them the space for a garden, in America would make them owners of hundreds of acres."[1] America has always promised its immigrants the gift of space and the ability to move about freely. In America it was possible to live in an expanding geographic and economic frontier and contribute to the growth of young cities widening across the prairies. For Jewish immigrants, in particular, American space held special meaning. At the founding moment of the Jewish people, God promised Abraham *infinite* progeny, telling him to "[l]ook now toward heaven, and count the stars. . . . So shall thy seed be," but He provided a *finite* amount of land in which Abraham's descendants should live, specifically the land "from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates."[2] Since that time, Jews have led a crowded, circumscribed existence: in more modern memory, the Jewish experience of space has occurred in ghettoes, pales of settlement, sweatshops, tenements, and concentration camps.

Texas was different. In 1909, the *Jewish Herald*, Houston's community weekly, ran a prominent half-page advertisement for the Buick Automobile Company on its back page. "Buicks have more real 'goability,'" the ad claimed,

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[1] Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973 [1951]): 29.
[2] *Genesis* 15:5 and 15:18.

"than any other car on the American market," and if readers would compare them "with other machines that cost anywhere from $500 or $1000 more . . . you will give us your order every time."[3] Texas Jews needed "goability"; they had distances to cover. "Distances have always been vast in Texas," writes historian T. R. Fehrenbach, "and they still are vast, even in the air and auto age. . . . Texas towns and cities are still dots in an immense space. The land dominates, in an almost Russian sense."[4] Texas Jews lived in cities that spread widely, taking advantage of cheap land; their businesses required many of them to travel extensively between cities lying hundreds of miles apart; their efforts to organize and to hold together a religious community in a very large state obligated them, particularly the rabbinate, to cover great distances on behalf of the community and the faith.

The Buick dealer who purchased the ad recognized that the *Herald*'s readers were potential customers, that they not only had a need for his product but the wherewithal to afford it. The fewer than 900 cars registered in Houston in 1909 were owned by just over 1% of the city's population, suggesting that the contraptions were still a luxury enjoyed only by the affluent.[5] And Jews were among the state's affluent. In 1914, the *American Israelite* reported that Dallas Jews constituted 2.5% of the city's population but controlled 11% of its wealth, a

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[3] *Jewish Herald* (6 May 1909). I have removed the original text's incorrect apostrophe from "Buick's."

[4] T.R. Fehrenbach, *Seven Keys to Texas* (El Paso: University of Texas at El Paso Press, 1986 [1983]): 32.

[5] The U.S. Census shows the 1910 population of Houston as 78,800, while the *Houston Automobile Register* for 1910 counted 870 registered cars in the city that year. My thanks to the reference librarians in the Texas Room at the Houston Public Library for locating this information.

ratio that "will probably apply in many sections of the state."[6] The *Jewish Herald* hints further at Texas Jews' disposable wealth: the same page which advertised Buicks also carried notices for the Herald Printing Company, offering "Wedding Invitations, Visiting Cards, or Business Stationery," and for Coca-Cola in individual five-cent bottles.[7]

Jewish Texans were financially successful, moreover, not only compared to other Texans but to other American Jews as well. The contrast between Texas and New York is particularly startling: while Houston Jews weighed Buicks against "other machines that cost anywhere from $500 or $1000 more," a recent Jewish immigrant in New York might count himself lucky to earn $300 a year.[8] One of the signal events in American labor history, the "Uprising of the 20,000," occurred the same year as the Buick advertisement in the *Jewish Herald*, when New York shirtwaist makers, mostly immigrant Jewish women, walked off the job and remained on strike for several months to protest intolerable working conditions in the city's notorious sweatshops. And while Texas Jews sought the "goability" of an automobile to navigate the wide open Texas spaces, their immigrant co-religionists in New York lived in some of the most confining conditions on Earth. "It is said that nowhere in the world are so many people crowded together on a square mile as here," Jacob Riis observed of the Jewish Lower East Side in 1890.[9] In *World of Our Fathers*, his definitive description of Jewish immigrant life in New York, Irving Howe reported that half the families

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[6] *American Israelite* (22 October 1914).
[7] *Jewish Herald* (6 May 1909).
[8] Henry L. Feingold, *Zion in America* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1981): 132.
[9] Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives* (New York: Dover Publications, 1971 [1890]): 85.

on the Lower East Side slept three or four people to a room, and that nearly another quarter crammed five or more into each bedroom.[10] The British writer Arnold Bennett observed that the very windows and doors of the Lower East Side "sweated humanity."[11] Some two million Eastern European Jews poured into the United States between 1880 and 1920, and most of them remained in the cities where they disembarked, stretching facilities to the breaking point. All of the familiar hazards of ghetto life – disease, poverty, fire, crime, and strained family relations – flowed directly from these overcrowded conditions.

Texas was different, however. "Most Jewish-Americans have folk memories of the squalid East Side tenements of Manhattan," Seth Wolitz has written, "but the Texas-Jewish community has an almost pastoral memory of growing up in peaceful Texas towns and small cities from Amarillo to Laredo, from Beaumont to El Paso."[12] Indeed, while most of New York's hundreds of thousands of Jewish inhabitants crowded into a neighborhood of only a few square miles, Texas Jews dispersed throughout their state's many cities and dozens of small towns. Between 1880 and 1920, the state's Jewish population grew markedly – from an estimated 3,300 to more than 30,000 – but this expansion matched the state's general population growth, so that Jews remained less than 1% of the overall population.[13] Thus, while America's great urban

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[10] Irving Howe, *World of our Fathers* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976): 148.
[11] Quoted in Howard M. Sachar, *A History of the Jews in America* (New York: Knopf, 1992): 141.
[12] Seth L. Wolitz, "Bifocality in Jewish Identity in the Texas-Jewish Experience," in Sander L. Gilman and Milton Shain, eds. *Jewries at the Frontier* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999): 187.
[13] *American Jewish Yearbook*; U.S. Census as reported in "United States Historical Census Data Browser" <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/census> [Accessed 20 December 2002]. In 1880, Jews represented about 0.2% of the general population of Texas. By 1920, that figure had risen to about 0.6%.

centers became great Jewish centers as well, enclaves which readily perpetuated Jewish life, language and religious practice, Texas cities absorbed their smaller share of immigrants with little notice and with little interruption to accustomed patterns of life. As each new arrival in New York, Philadelphia, or Chicago added to the ethnic and religious vitality of those cities, as New York in particular became a world-renowned center of Jewish life, Jewish communities in Texas became ever more peripheral.

These developments were not lost on many Texas Jews, who were painfully aware of their distance from the bustling centers of American Judaism. Houston's Rabbi Henry Barnston complained in 1907 that Texas religious leaders were "far removed from intellectual centers" and "pine for Jewish intellectual companionship."[14] Others, however, defended Texas as a place where meaningful Jewish life could and did occur. Rabbi Samuel Rosinger of Beaumont, who arrived in Texas in 1910, recounted in a memoir how "a well-known Jewish writer" once visited his city and, impressed with the rabbi's warmth and erudition, asked him, "What heinous sin have you committed that in expiation you have buried yourself in this hole?" Rosinger responded that, "far from being buried, I was very much alive. We had in Texas a very active kallah [scholarly rabbinical group]. . . . I was an editorial writer for The Texas Jewish

[14] Rabbi H. Barnstein, of Houston, responding to Nathan Cohn's Address of Welcome, in *Southern Rabbinical Association: Conference Papers and Sermons Delivered at the Fourth Annual Convention Held in Nashville, TN, Dec. 24, 25, 26, 1906* (Nashville 1907), quoted in Stanley Chyet, "Reflections on Southern-Jewish Historiography," in Nathan Kaganoff and Melvin Urofsky, eds., *Turn To The South: Essays On Southern Jewry* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979): 13. Rabbi Barnston changed the spelling of his surname from Barnstein in 1920 after U.S. immigration officials detained him on his return to the country from a trip abroad; he hoped that the Americanized name would provide protection from such misunderstandings in the future. "Rabbi Changes His Name," *Texas Jewish Herald* (25 March 1920).

Herald for many years. Throughout my ministry, I have been intimately associated with movements of social uplift and civic betterment of our city."[15]

The *Jewish Herald* (later the *Texas Jewish Herald*, and still later the *Jewish Herald-Voice*), the state's first and, for many years, its only Jewish newspaper, attempted to describe the distinct character, interests, and opinions of Texas Jewry, capture and elaborate their differences, and define the boundaries that differentiated them from Jews in New York and elsewhere. The *Herald*'s founding editor and publisher, Edgar Goldberg, managed the paper from its creation in 1908 until his death thirty years later and tried continually to define his readership as a unified, cohesive community distinct from other Jewish communities. Goldberg sought to describe Texas Jewry as an autonomous, unified subset of American Jewry, separated by imaginary geographic and conceptual boundaries from other American Jews. "The Jews of Texas are interested in Texas just a little bit more than they are in Ohio or New York," he observed. "Matters of interest to the Jews of Texas can be more thoroughly disseminated through the columns of the Jewish Herald than any other medium." He edited the *Herald* "in behalf of no particular faction of Jewry," he wrote, "but in the interest of the Jews of Texas as a unit. . . . 'Texas news for Texas Jews.'"[16] Goldberg's regionalism sometimes approached chauvinism, as in one notable instance which will receive extensive treatment below, when Goldberg used the pages of the *Herald* to challenge the right of Jewish leaders in New York (whom he disparaged as a

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[15] Samuel Rosinger, "Deep in the Heart of Texas," in Stanley F. Chyet, ed., *Lives And Voices: A Collection of American Jewish Memoirs* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1972): 136-37.

[16] *Jewish Herald* (28 July 1910).

"syndicate") to speak on behalf of American Jewry as a whole.[17] In this and in many other instances, Goldberg spoke for a Texas Jewish population that he felt had come into its own as a mature and distinctive community, fully the equal of any other in the country and prepared to take its place on a national stage.

When Goldberg started the *Jewish Herald* in 1908, Houston was growing and prospering, ripe for a Jewish publication. Between 1900 and 1920, the city's Jewish population more than doubled, from about 2,500 to somewhere between 5,000 and 7,000.[18] Many of Houston's new Jewish residents had moved inland from Galveston after the 1900 hurricane had devastated the island and its economy. Others came from all over the nation seeking business opportunities related to the 1901 discovery of oil in nearby Beaumont and the completion of the Houston Ship Channel in 1914, both of which promised to make Houston one of the nation's busiest ports. In a 1983 letter, Abram Geller of Galveston remembered the masses flowing through his city to Houston:

> I know [many] families who can trace their forerunners who followed this path towards Houston, the city of greater opportunities, it having become known at that time as "The City Where 17 Railroads Meet the Sea." These railroads gave jobs to hundreds of the newcomers, many of whom had heard in N.Y. & other eastern cities of the opportunity of making a good living in Houston and still being able to lead a relatively good Jewish life there.[19]

In addition to this influx, Houston received about 400 of the Galveston Movement immigrants, more than any other Texas city. Their influence was evident in the

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[17] *Jewish Herald* (1 February 1912).

[18] *American Jewish Yearbook*. The estimate of 7,000 comes from the director of the United Jewish Charities in Houston, reported in the *Jewish Herald* (12 November 1914), so the actual number was probably even higher by 1920.

[19] Abram Geller to the Editor of the *Texas Humanist* (9 February 1983), TJHS Box 3A171, Folder 3.

maintenance of three Orthodox congregations with a combined membership greater than that of Congregation Beth Israel, the city's Reform temple.[20]

Edgar Goldberg was confident that Houston could support a Jewish newspaper of its own. To test his theory, Goldberg wrote and distributed a one-page circular, the *Houston Jewish Bulletin*, in April, 1907, which briefly treated the activities of the city's Jewish community.[21] Goldberg proposed to incorporate the newsletter into a regular "Anglo Jewish weekly which would chronicle the news affecting the Jews of Texas."[22] The idea found popular support, and Goldberg prepared the first weekly issue of the *Jewish Herald* for circulation on Rosh Hashanah, September 24, 1908.

Eight pages long and four columns wide, the first *Herald* contained an introductory message in which Goldberg offered the paper "to the people of Houston" and asked the secretaries of local Jewish societies to pass on news of their activities for him to report. "The columns of the Herald will be open at all times," he promised, "to those who have anything to say that will be of benefit to our co-religionists or community."[23] The first lead story was a detailed account of the dedication of a new synagogue for Adath Yeshurun, the city's largest Orthodox congregation, including a description of the dedication ceremony and speeches, a photograph of the congregation's rabbi, and a sketch of the new

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[20] Membership estimates from 1916 show Adath Emeth with 75 member families, Adath Israel with 60, Adath Yeshurun with 260, and Beth Israel with 250. *History of the Jewish Literary Society of Houston, Texas, June 27, 1906 to June 30, 1916* (Houston, 1916): 48.

[21] I have been unable to locate an extant copy of the *Houston Jewish Bulletin*. Its existence is reported in "Editorial Comment," *Jewish Herald-Voice, Passover Eightieth Anniversary Edition* (2 April 1988): 4.

[22] Quoted in "Editorial Comment," 4.

[23] "Salutatory," *Jewish Herald* (24 September 1908).

building.[24] A smaller article in the same issue described the construction of a new temple for Reform Congregation Beth Israel. From the first issue, Goldberg presented a picture of a Jewish community that was dynamic, prosperous and harmonious. Two years later he reiterated his commitment to making the *Herald* "a paper devoted to Jewish interests wherever found in general and to matters of interest to Jews in Texas in particular." It was not to be "the organ of any party within the creed and hence will give publicity to all matters of news appertaining to Orthodoxy, Reform, Zionism and Anti-Zionism, one as well as the other, regardless of whom it may suit or may not suit."[25] This approach would also, of course, guarantee the largest possible readership for the *Herald*.

Making the transition from a one-time, one-page bulletin to an eight-page weekly was difficult, however, and Goldberg struggled to find and to cover enough news of local interest to fill his pages. Lacking staff and resources, he copied much of his content from other newspapers. Early issues contained features like "Jewish Women in New York"; "In Memory of Heine"; a reprinted sermon by a rabbi in Baltimore; a feature story on the Baroness de Hirsch; and pages of jokes and witty sayings. To strengthen his local appeal, which was the *Herald*'s commitment to covering "matters of interest to Jews in Texas in particular," Goldberg introduced a regular feature titled "Local Notes," in which he opened his columns to Houston's Jewish citizens, allowing them to share important events in their lives, from marriages and births to changes of address

[24] "Adath Yeshurun Synagogue Dedicated," *Jewish Herald* (24 September 1908).
[25] *Jewish Herald* (9 June 1910).

and family vacations.[26] As the Jewish community grew, "Local Notes" helped to preserve a sense, an illusion perhaps, that all the Jews in town were friends, that they were a cohesive community interested in the daily details of one another's lives. Every wedding, motor trip, or visitor from out of state was news in which all of Houston's Jews could share.

Within his first year, though, Goldberg began to set his sights on a wider readership and a broader sense of community. In December, 1908, he ran an advertisement calling for representatives in other Texas cities to "take subscriptions and correspond for the Jewish Herald," and the following summer he introduced a "Texas News" page dedicated to items of Jewish interest from cities and towns around the state.[27] The next year he bragged that the *Herald* had "special correspondents at not less than fifteen [of the] most important points in the State," and in 1914, to clarify his paper's statewide appeal, Goldberg changed its name from the *Jewish Herald* to the *Texas Jewish Herald*.[28] "From the local publication which it was at its inception," the editor boasted, "[the *Herald*] has become the organ of all Jewry in Texas." He explained that he made the change on the advice of readers who had pointed out that the *Herald* was "as closely identified with Jewish interests in Dallas, Fort Worth, Waco, Austin, San Antonio, Galveston, El Paso, Beaumont, Corsicana, Tyler, Palestine and nearly all of the smaller towns in Texas as with Houston."[29] The idea that Jews in Galveston and

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[26] "Local Notes," *Jewish Herald* (12 August 1909).
[27] *Jewish Herald* (31 December 1908, 19 August 1909).
[28] *Jewish Herald* (28 July 1910); *Texas Jewish Herald* (26 November 1914).
[29] *Texas Jewish Herald* (26 November 1914). Palestine is a town in East Texas. Goldberg once joked cryptically that "Possibly the reason for Texas being such a hotbed for Zionists is the fact that Palestine is centrally and conveniently located." *Jewish Herald* (28 July 1910).

El Paso (which is geographically closer to Los Angeles than to many Texas towns) had anything in common was, at best, a questionable assumption, but for Goldberg it was a matter of principle. The long list of towns reflects Goldberg's intention to define a Texas-Jewish community that filled the state's expansive geographical boundaries, and the new name reflected that mission.

In his effort to appeal to readers across the state, Goldberg concentrated on items with recognizable Texas interest. Articles on the "Part Taken by the Jews in American Wars" and the "Patriotism of the Jews," for example, included several Texas-Jewish examples.[30] He used local rabbis like David Goldberg of Wichita Falls (who bore no relation to the editor) and Samuel Rosinger of Beaumont as editorialists on Jewish religious matters, even when nationally known commentators were available for reprinting. And he dedicated entire issues to individual Texas cities, covering not only their Jewish communities but their civic and business activities as well: these reports revealed a wish among Jews to participate fully in the rampant boosterism that accompanied Texas's growth in the first decades of the century.[31] Goldberg sought out a Texas angle even when articles had no clear Jewish relevance: in 1909 he reprinted "The Last Trail of Jesse Bolande," a western story set in the state's mythic cowboy past.[32]

The *Herald* also offered opinions on a wide variety of topics, both local and international, secular and religious. Goldberg only occasionally wrote the

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[30] *Jewish Herald* (12 February 1909, 19 February 1909).
[31] See, for example, "Beaumont Jewish Community Edition: Beaumont, Its Rapid Growth and Bright Future," *Texas Jewish Herald* (22 October 1925); "El Paso, Texas, Edition: El Paso Possesses All The Beauties of Fairyland," *Texas Jewish Herald* (12 November 1925); and "Galveston Edition," *Texas Jewish Herald* (21 June 1928).
[32] *Jewish Herald* (21 January 1909).

paper's editorials himself, relying on the contributions of guest editors, some of whom wrote for him for many years. These included distinguished members of Houston's Jewish community such as H.B. Lieberman, the cantor at Adath Yeshurun, who contributed many early opinions on matters of Jewish practice and identity; and Mrs. B. Lurie, a participant in Houston's Jewish charities, who wrote of Jewish life in the city, raising issues that included intermarriage, parochial schools, Beaumont's search for a rabbi, and "Jewish ostentation," as well as offering her own short stories and poetry to readers.[33] Several Texas rabbis also contributed opinions to the paper. Samuel Rosinger and David Goldberg each wrote for the *Herald* for years, generally on questions of Jewish holidays and religious practice, though occasionally on political matters. Rabbi Rosinger, for example, appealed on behalf of Leo Frank, the Atlanta merchant who had been falsely accused of murdering a young girl in 1915; applauded President Wilson's appointment of Louis Brandeis to the U.S. Supreme Court; and mourned the displacement of European Jews during World War I.[34] Rabbi Goldberg wrote extensively about the lasting effects of World War I on world Jewry, particularly the renewed possibility of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine.

The importance of Jewish charities and benevolent societies was one of the most common themes in the *Herald*'s pages. Edgar Goldberg and his featured writers regularly promoted involvement in local organizations like the Jewish

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[33] Mrs. B. Lurie, "Intermarriage," *Jewish Herald* (23 June 1910), "Parochial Schools," *Jewish Herald* (18 August 1910), "That Beaumont Ad for a Rabbi," *Jewish Herald* (26 May 1910), and "Jewish Ostentation," *Jewish Herald* (28 July 1910).

[34] Samuel Rosinger, "Do Your Duty By Leo Frank," *Jewish Herald* (17 December 1914), "Louis D. Brandeis," *Jewish Herald* (3 February 1916), and "Jews and the War," *Jewish Herald* (3 September 1914).

Free Loan Society, which helped Jewish families establish themselves in Houston, and the Jewish Charity Home sponsored by the Jewish Women's Benevolent Society. Goldberg also encouraged his readers to give to programs outside the city: the Jewish Children's Home of New Orleans, the Hebrew Relief Society of Fort Worth, the National Jewish Hospital for Consumptives, and, in later years, the National Council of Jewish Women. In addition, the *Herald* publicized programs to provide for the poor, for orphans, for the ill and infirm, for the aged, and for the unemployed. "How many are planning to make a few orphans happy at this season?" Mrs. Lurie asked in the summer of 1910. "A day in the country, a street car ride, an impromptu picnic does not cost so very much, but will be quite an event in the lives of the little ones who have neither father nor mother to plan for them."[35] The *Jewish Herald* was the only source for information about many such local activities, and Goldberg was diligent in reporting the goals, successes, activities, fundraising initiatives, and general development of the city's Jewish charities.

Starting in 1910, the *Herald* advocated vigorously for a union of Houston Jewish charities, a federation to improve the efficiency of local benevolent work. "We do not maintain that good work is not being done in Houston," read one editorial, "but we do insist that the energy of the different organizations combined into one would exert a greater influence for good, would more systematically relieve conditions which present themselves, and increase the zeal of those who need but be shown and would respond magnificently and bountifully." Although

[35] Mrs. B. Lurie, "Help Orphans," *Jewish Herald* (21 July 1910).

many of Houston's benevolent institutions had been around a long time and had been doing important work for many years, the editorial went on to say, the time had come to prepare them for the future. "Uniting under one representative body," the *Herald* argued, "would obviate much impracticability, wastefulness, unprogressiveness and duplication of efforts."[36] Mrs. Lurie insisted that the answer to making Jewish charity as effective as possible was simple: "In a Word – Federate!"[37] In 1914, after much prodding by the *Herald* and the Jewish clergy, Goldberg announced on the front page the creation of the United Jewish Charities of Houston.[38]

The *Herald* carried a smattering of congregational news, particularly the comings and goings of rabbis, the purchases of property and construction of synagogues, and annual events like confirmations and holiday worship services. When in 1911, a dispute over confirmation ceremonies led one faction within Adath Yeshurun to sue another faction, the *Herald* covered the proceedings, urged arbitration, and reported on the erosion of the congregation's cohesiveness. In 1914, one Adath Yeshurun faction broke with the congregation and formed another Orthodox congregation, Beth Shalom, an event which the *Herald* also dutifully reported.

In addition to charity information and congregational events, the *Herald* carried news from secular Jewish organizations, both local and national. The Jewish Literary Society of Houston, which sponsored public readings, discussion

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[36] *Jewish Herald* (3 August 1911).
[37] Mrs. B. Lurie, "In a Word – Federate!," *Jewish Herald* (27 April 1911).
[38] "Houston's Jewish Charities Finally United," *Jewish Herald* (15 January 1914).

groups and theatrical productions, was one of Goldberg's personal favorites; he was a member and officer for many years. The Society had its own column which reported on its activities, elections, and the apparently interminable effort to find a building of its own. The Jewish Chautauqua, to which Houston regularly sent delegates, was a regular gathering of representatives from Jewish communities across the country, where participants met to discuss issues of national importance to American Jews and to build cooperative networks among communities, and Goldberg printed reports from their national meetings. The *Herald* also carried news from national and state meetings of Zionists, Reform and Orthodox rabbinical conferences, and, eventually, the American Jewish Committee.

More than any other organization, though, the International Order B'nai B'rith had a prominent place in the *Herald*'s pages. Modeled after gentile fraternal organizations like the Masons, B'nai B'rith worked to organize and legitimize Jewish civic activity, providing a forum for recognizing Jewish achievement, advocating for Jewish concerns, and preserving a sense of international Jewish unity. When Edgar Goldberg first became involved in the Order, B'nai B'rith was still a relatively new organization, but it had chapters in most of America's major cities and held regular meetings at the local, district, and national levels. Houston was in District 7, which had its headquarters in New Orleans, and Goldberg served as district treasurer for many years. Late in his life, he was responsible for establishing Houston's first chapter of AZA, the B'nai B'rith young men's organization.

Goldberg covered local B'nai B'rith events and charted its growth as a national and international organization. He attended every District 7 annual convention and reported extensively on their activities, resolutions and elections. He spotlighted the leaders of the Order, often devoting entire pages to statements made by district and national executives. He took every opportunity to defend the Order's principles and to extol the integrity of its members. And, as he did for Jewish charities, Goldberg encouraged his readers to become involved in B'nai B'rith, informing them of meetings and membership drives. In one editorial, Goldberg all but equated B'nai B'rith with Judaism itself, proclaiming that the Order's "purposes and aims are such that to be a good Jew but requires one to be a good B'nai B'rith."[39] In 1928, the Houston chapter of B'nai B'rith honored Goldberg for his service with a testimonial dinner.

Despite his coverage of national and international issues and events, Goldberg remained devoted to producing a newspaper that delivered "Texas News for Texas Jews." His way of doing so all but overlooked Texas's growing population of Jewish immigrants, appealing directly to the native-born and acculturated: he assumed that his readers had deeper roots in America, particularly in the South, than in Europe. Thus he occasionally printed stories explaining the Jewish contribution to Confederate history, as in an article on Jewish statesmanship which included a lengthy account of Judah P. Benjamin, a South Carolina Jew who had been prominent in the Confederate government.[40] He sometimes appealed to his readers' Southern identity in articles that had no

[39] "Editorial," *Jewish Herald* (5 October 1911).
[40] "The American Jew as Statesman," *Jewish Herald* (17 February 1910).

specifically Jewish context at all, as when he reprinted an article titled "The Southland," a celebration of the myths of the Old South and the Lost Cause.[41] And when, in 1910, several of Dallas's white citizens took it upon themselves to hang one of the city's black citizens from a tree, Goldberg wrote an editorial that could have come from many Southern papers of the day. Insisting that "murder, yes, lynching, is a crime to be condemned in the most stringent manner, and nothing, absolutely nothing, can be said in its defense," he went on to denounce the interest that Northern papers had taken in the episode. "Each section has conditions to contend with that can not be governed to suit the like or dislike of the other section," he wrote. "The South is well able to take care of its own notwithstanding the comments of our Northern contemporaries."[42] It is impossible to know how common such views were among Goldberg's readers, but the paper's growing circulation seems to suggest that Goldberg was not the only Jewish Texan who felt this way.[43]

Edgar Goldberg, who was not a native Texan, was a product of the post-Civil War Deep South, and his childhood largely accounts for his regionalist sensibility. The future editor was born in 1876 in Delta, Louisiana, a village suburb of Vicksburg, the same year that Democrats "redeemed" Mississippi from the Republican political dominance of Reconstruction. When Edgar was two, his mother died in a yellow fever epidemic, followed by his father five years later.

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[41] Anna Bashear, "The Southland," *Jewish Herald* (5 March 1909).
[42] *Jewish Herald* (17 March 1910).
[43] In 1911, the *Herald* had an estimated 1,150 subscribers, which grew to 3,500 by 1920 and to a high of 6,600 in 1933. Circulation fell significantly during the Great Depression and did not recover until after Goldberg's death. *Newspaper Annual and Directory*, volumes for 1910 through 1945.

The boy went to live briefly with his only remaining family, his father's sister and her husband, a native Arkansan and Confederate veteran who had been wounded at the Battle of Fort Donelson in 1862.[44] Unable to support an additional child, they sent him to live at the Jewish Children's Home in New Orleans, where he stayed until he was nearly fifteen. The Jewish Children's Home took in orphans and other needy children from across the South, and its blend of civic and ethical education, general studies, and liberal Judaism had much to do with shaping several generations of Southern Jewish children. Goldberg remained deeply grateful throughout his life for the opportunities that the Children's Home had given him, and he regularly used the pages of the *Herald* to encourage his readers to support it financially; on one occasion he described the Children's Home as "that dearly beloved institution over in New Orleans that cares for the Jewish orphans of our fair Southland."[45] In the *Herald*'s first year, he committed the whole front page of six consecutive issues to an institutional history of the Children's Home in celebration of its fifty-fifth anniversary.[46]

After leaving New Orleans and reuniting with his family, Goldberg worked briefly as a jeweler's apprentice in Jackson, Mississippi, learning the engraving techniques he would later apply to steel printer's type. The family

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[44] *Official Reports of Battles Embracing the Defence of Vicksburg* misidentifies Goldberg's uncle, Isaac Aaron Gleitzman, as Avon Glitzman and lists him as "severely wounded" at Donelson. In *The Provincials*, Eli Evans notes Gleitzman as one of several Jews who fought for the Confederacy. "While the Confederacy awarded him its Cross of Honor for 'conspicuous gallantry in the field,'" Evans writes, "he was proudest that he had never eaten any *trefa* or nonkosher food during his entire four years of military service. His family retains to this day the two mess kits he carried with him during the war, one for meat and one for milk." *Official Reports of Battles Embracing the Defence of Vicksburg* (Richmond: Smith, Bailey & Co., 1863): 117; Eli Evans, *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South* (New York: Atheneum, 1980): 63-64.

[45] Edgar Goldberg, "EGO," *Texas Jewish Herald* (6 January 1927).

[46] *Jewish Herald* (10 December 1908 through 14 January 1909).

moved to Memphis, where Edgar took a job at the *Spectator*, a local Jewish newspaper, laying out type on the printing press. In 1899, at twenty-three years of age, Goldberg left his family and traveled to St. Louis to work for the Sanders Engraving Company, where he remained for more than five years, "locking up forms" and dreaming of opening his own print shop.[47] In St. Louis, he met Esther Ruppin, the daughter of a successful cigar merchant (and first cousin of Zionist leader Arthur Ruppin), and the couple were married in 1900. The first of their three daughters was born the next year.

In 1905, Edgar took his young family to Lufkin, Texas, where he worked as a reporter for the local paper before moving two years later to Houston, which had the largest Jewish community in the area. Without a Jewish community in Lufkin, the Goldbergs sent their oldest daughter to Sunday School with gentile children, but "when she came home asking about Jesus Christ all the time and why don't we like Jesus Christ," their youngest daughter recalled, "they decided it was time to go."[48] By the time he arrived in Houston, Goldberg had lived and worked in several Southern cities, and he had come to view the nation's affairs, as well as Jewish affairs, in regionalist terms. The *Herald* reflected that outlook throughout Goldberg's tenure as editor.

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[47] "Goldburgs [sic] Dream," Typescript on Sanders Engraving Company Letterhead, [c. 1900], Author's Collection.

[48] Author's interview with Edna Goldberg Friedberg (25 June 1994). Despite Mrs. Friedberg's recollection, there is some evidence that other Jews lived in Lufkin at about the time the Goldbergs were there. A reporter for the *New York Times* interviewed a Jewish woman in 1983 who had grown up there and whose Polish-born grandfather had become a bank director. "We celebrated all the holidays, both Jewish and Christian," she recalled. "For Passover we'd clear the flour from the house. The next week we'd dye Easter eggs." Roy Hoffman, "Passover Tradition in American South," *New York Times* (23 March 1983).

The ideas of a regional Judaism and a regional Jewish publication, however, were not Goldberg's invention. The *Jewish South*, a weekly edited first in Atlanta and later in New Orleans by Rabbi E.M. Browne, was an important precursor to the *Herald*'s regional perspective. Browne billed his product as "the only Jewish journal this side of 'Mason and Dixon's line'" and proclaimed in his first issue, in October of 1877, that the paper would be "a Southern Jewish periodical preeminently." Browne observed that journals based on the East and West coasts had limited circulation, while the only Jewish paper in the middle part of the country, the *American Israelite*, had "too large a territory to oversee, and affairs nearer home will naturally obtain preference over items from the far South."[49] Browne considered Texas a Southern state, and readers in Texas responded enthusiastically. Correspondents in Corpus Christi, Denison, Dallas, Calvert and other Texas cities wrote frequently to the *Jewish South*, and Rabbi Jacob Voorsanger of Houston contributed "Lone Star Flashes," a regular report of Jewish activities in Texas. In 1878, the leading Jews of more than twenty-five Texas cities welcomed the paper's associate editor, Charles Wessolowsky, as he toured the state drumming up new subscriptions.[50]

Browne overtly positioned his paper as an alternative to the *American Israelite*, the national Jewish paper published in Cincinnati by Isaac Mayer Wise, the nation's leading rabbi and chief proponent of Reform Judaism in America.

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[49] "Salutatory," *Jewish South* (14 October 1877), emphasis in the original.

[50] Browne published Wessolowsky's weekly dispatches from cities throughout the South, including Texas, and the letters stand as one of the most complete first-hand records of Southern Jewry in the years after Reconstruction. They are reprinted in *Reflections Of Southern Jewry: The Letters Of Charles Wessolowsky, 1878-1879*, ed. Louis Schmier (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1982).

Wise, a powerful leader in the drive to organize American Jewry nationally, founded several institutions to pursue that goal: the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), which Wise intended as a kind of governing board of American Reform congregations; the Hebrew Union College (HUC), which trained and assigned Reform rabbis; and the *American Israelite*, which promoted Wise's vision of an American Jewry united under Reform principles and organized into a national institutional structure with its ultimate headquarters in Wise's own hat.

Part of Wise's goal in the *Israelite* was to nurture American Jewish unity by providing a forum for American Jews to share their local achievements, and he regularly printed reports from correspondents across the country, including the South. In this regard E.M. Browne presented the *Jewish South* as a direct competitor for the attention of Southern readers interested in seeing more coverage of their home states and communities. While Wise concentrated on institutional activities such as the establishment of synagogues and benevolent societies – reserving his special praise for UAHC member congregations – Browne's narrower focus allowed for news of a startling personal specificity. "We have here amongst others," wrote a correspondent in Palestine, Texas, "a very wealthy (young) bachelor – very influential in the community – Mr. Henry Ash, and a very smart and modest gentleman, Mr. I. Kopf, both worth 'setting a cap for.' Mark it, girls."[51] Several towns boasted of establishing Jewish Sunday

[51] Letter from "Palestine," *Jewish South* (8 March 1878).

schools, a movement which Browne vociferously supported, and bragged, by name, about the quality and piety of their wives and children.

In his most direct challenge to Wise's nationalizing effort, Browne used the *Jewish South* as a platform to criticize the institutions that Wise had founded. Browne and his readers perceived a regional bias in the policies of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations which, they charged, favored communities and congregations in urban rather than rural settings, putting the more dispersed South at a disadvantage. "Don't you see," Browne asked his readers, "that every one of the members of the board is a member of a large congregation, possessing a magnificent temple with a preacher to speak every Sabbath. . . . Those big guns of big congregations do not think as you do, they do not feel as you do, and they disregard your claims." Browne insisted that the Union's board should include representatives of the rural South. "The Israelites in small towns pay their dues," he argued. "They pay their dues promptly, they pay their dues cheerfully, and taxation without representation is not to be allowed in a free country."[52] Browne was fond of employing such revolutionary rhetoric in his attacks on Wise.

In support of one particularly popular cause, Browne attacked the Hebrew Union College for failing to place enough young rabbis in Southern posts – or at least to make temporary rabbis available to Jews in rural areas. To reach the sparsely populated Southern and Western states, Browne advocated "circuit preaching," an arrangement by which rabbis in larger communities would roam a wide area performing services for smaller groups that could not support their own

[52] *Jewish South* (7 March 1879).

permanent rabbi. He urged Wise and the HUC to develop a nationwide program to train and support circuit-riding rabbis. The idea was popular with Browne's readers, but Wise's slow response provided a source of outraged letters to the editor. A correspondent in Calvert, Texas, wrote to Browne to complain that circuit riding was an "all absorbing topic that agitates our small congregations," but if left to the HUC, "we surely will not have any." The reason, the writer explained, was that "the principle part of the delegates are from the large cities and have their ministers, schools, and societies, and while they are enjoying all of these advantages, they can show us a perfect feeling of indifference."[53] Browne took up the complaint, remarking that the Union's leaders "do not know what it means to live in a place without a temple or Jewish society at all. Those men do not know the yearning of the Israelite in a lonely village to hear, now and then, a minister of his own in explanation of the doctrines of Judaism."[54]

Because of the especially great distances between towns in Texas, Jews there were among the first to address the matter of circuit riding. Rabbi Jacob Voorsanger of Houston wrote in the *Jewish South* that many Jews in Texas and throughout the South "would engage in the holy cause [of Judaism] if they would receive the proper encouragement." Voorsanger complained that "the U.A.H.C. is very slow in instituting circuit preaching, hence the friends of Israel must strike out unaided."[55] In 1879, Voorsanger met with other Texas rabbis, including Abraham Blum of Galveston and H.M. Bien of Dallas, to create their own circuit-

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[53] Letter from "Harmony," *Jewish South* (5 September 1879).
[54] *Jewish South* (7 March 1879).
[55] *Jewish South* (5 December 1879).

riding scheme, which they offered to Wise as a model for other parts of the country.[56] "After this," Voorsanger promised, "small communities who desire Sunday Schools or lectures can have no excuse."[57] Isaac Wise noted the achievement in the *Israelite* and happily reported "one of the first instances of the rite of circumcision having been performed in Mexico," which occurred when Rabbi Blum "was summoned to undertake a journey of 500 miles – almost entirely in a traveling carriage – to circumcise a Jewish child at New Laredo."[58] Despite Wise's pleasure, it took the UAHC more than fifteen years to adopt a national circuit-riding program. In the meantime, Browne provided space in the *Jewish South* for the communities most affected by that hesitance to lodge their complaints and to apply pressure to Cincinnati.

In another provocative case, the *Jewish South* printed a report from Dallas of a liturgical split in their Reform congregation that had led some members to design their own holiday prayer book, one which "they thought would suit all parties, or at least come as near doing so as any that could be arranged."[59] The congregation had been using the *Minhag America*, the prayer book which Isaac Wise edited and circulated, but they replaced it with their own, entitled the

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[56] Cathy Schechter, "Shalom, Y'all," *Texas Highways* (August 1990): 52; Hollace Ava Weiner, "The Mixers: The Role of Rabbis Deep in the Heart of Texas," *American Jewish History* 85 (September 1997): 291-92; *Jewish South* (18 January 1878): 5. Louis Schmier has written that the Texas plan "was a revolutionary one. It was not until the late 1880s that U.A.H.C. took up this issue. It was not until 1895 that the Committee on Circuit-Preaching successfully developed a circuit-preaching plan." Louis Schmier, "Introduction," in Wessolowsky, 81n.55. For a fuller history of the circuit riding movement and the actions of the UAHC, see Steven Fox, "On the Road to Unity: The Union of American Hebrew Congregations and American Jewry, 1873-1903," *American Jewish Archives* 32 (November 1980): 145-93.

[57] *Jewish South* (5 December 1879).

[58] *American Israelite* (17 September 1880).

[59] *Jewish South* (13 September 1878).

Minhag Dallas. Browne gleefully recognized the new volume as an affront to the great Cincinnati rabbi. "'Minhag Dallas' is the latest addition to our numerous prayer books," he wrote. "We believe the book being created by a 'congregation' has more authority to 'back it' than the other prayer books now in existence created only by individuals. The Minhag America has been rejected for the Minhag Dallas."[60] Such disputes with Isaac Wise were typical of Browne's promotion of a regional Judaism, arising from his belief that a periodical emanating from an institutional center could not represent Jews living in peripheral communities dispersed throughout the South.

Edgar Goldberg may or may not have been familiar with the *Jewish South*; it ceased publication in 1883, when he was six years old. Nevertheless, Browne's paper provides an early model of the regionalist stance Goldberg adopted, and the positive response of Texas Jews toward the *Jewish South* indicated an interest in a regional Jewish publication which Goldberg later exploited. Many of Goldberg's pronouncements about the purposes behind the *Texas Jewish Herald* closely resemble Browne's statements in the *Jewish South*. Goldberg's belief, for example, that "[t]he Jews of Texas are interested in Texas just a little bit more than they are in Ohio or New York," and his insistence that his Texas readers should favor his paper over national journals like the *American Israelite*, recalled Browne's observation that the *Israelite* slighted Southern news in favor of covering events closer to home. More particularly, Goldberg's wish to provide local Jewish news – and his belief that such a thing as local Jewish news existed –

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[60] *Jewish South* (6 September 1878). The idiosyncratic and inexplicable quotation marks are Browne's.

indicated that he was building on the ideological foundation that Browne had established more than thirty years before.

As Browne had set himself against the national leadership of Isaac Wise, Edgar Goldberg looked to New York, then emerging as the center of American Jewish life, as a rhetorical foil. By 1908, when Goldberg founded the *Herald*, there was little doubt that the Jewish communities of Texas and those of New York were developing in very different ways. By the end of World War I, fully 70% of America's Jews lived in the major cities of the Northeast and another 20% in those of the Midwest.[61] The Galveston Movement was largely unsuccessful at redirecting the flow of European immigration to Texas; New York, and to a lesser degree other large cities of the Northeast and Midwest, remained the destination of choice for the vast majority of immigrants.

Jews in Texas and across Jacob Schiff's "hinterland" supported the Galveston Movement, in part because they wanted the infusion of Jewish culture that direct immigration promised – though with an eye toward gentile reaction they more often spoke of the labor that immigrants would provide. Grieving over the religious laxity of his fellow San Antonio Jews, Alexander Ziskind Gurwitz observed optimistically that

> God sends the antidote to the poison, always in time. Daily, new Jewish immigrants come to these shores. They come fresh from the Judaism-soaked villages and *shtedtlach* of Russia and Poland; just yesterday from the Rebbe's table, from the yeshivah. They revived, by their very presence, the heart of Judaism in their fellow Jews here. As to them the Jewish way of life was vibrant, so they brought constantly renewed vibrancy to their "older brothers" in America. This is the way it went, for

[61] Sachar, 140.

> many years. American Jewry drew its constant rejuvenation from the persistent flow of new Jewish immigrants.[62]

But Texas was not New York, and this "rejuvenation" was short-lived. Usually within only a few years, immigrants to Texas began to show signs of accommodating to local Jewish society. By its very nature, then, the Galveston Movement was bound to fail: the immigrants who most possessed the "true" Jewish identity which hinterland communities desired were exactly those who were least willing to leave the established Jewish centers that preserved Jewish customs and religious practice.

In contrast to the rich Jewish centers of New York and other great cities, where large numbers of immigrants remade Jewish communities in their own image, the smaller numbers of Eastern European immigrants to Texas adapted quickly to the climate they encountered. Houston, home of the *Jewish Herald*, provides an example of how minimally this Eastern European handful affected the character of Jewish life in Texas. As Stuart Rockoff has demonstrated, "[t]he Russian Jews who came to Houston largely conformed to the patterns that had already been set by their German brethren."[63] Elaine Maas, who conducted extensive studies of Houston's Jewish community, also observes that the Russian immigrants found upon their arrival in Houston an entrenched and prosperous German-Jewish community" which set the tone of Jewish life in the city. "Instead of the Russians stamping their ethos on the Jews already in Houston, as they did

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[62] Alexander Ziskind Gurwitz, *Memories of Two Generations*, tr. Amram Prero, vol. 2 [c.1932]: 251.

[63] Stuart Rockoff, "Identity and Assimilation: The Jewish Community of Houston," Unpublished Seminar Paper (15 May 1995): 59.

in New York and other large cities," Maas explains, "they were absorbed by the ethos or style of those who were here."[64] In Houston, as in other Texas cities, that ethos was Reform, acculturistic, politically conservative, and non-Zionist. Thus most new Jewish arrivals in Houston, even those who remained followers of Orthodox religious practice, accommodated to the secular and political lifestyle that already characterized the city.

The limited emergence of Yiddish-language activities in Houston provides an illustration. A large audience attended the productions of a visiting Yiddish theater group in 1916 and 1917, and a Yiddish Library Society established in 1916 soon grew to more than 100 members.[65] The Jewish Literary Society, a club dedicated to promoting "culture and character along lines approved by Jewish thought and ethics," sponsored a Yiddish-language lecture by Rabbi Charles Blumenthal of Fort Worth, which the *Jewish Herald* proclaimed one of the society's best attended meetings, a "compliment to the many of our Jewish citizens who best understand the language" and to those who "wanted to listen to the language of their childhood."[66] But the *Herald*'s language is telling: Yiddish was the language of the past, not of the present. Yiddish was for many "the language of their childhood," but virtually all Jewish immigrants to Houston soon learned to speak English and used it regularly.[67] Despite occasional social events at which Yiddish was spoken, no Houston rabbi delivered sermons in the

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[64] Elaine H. Maas, "Jews," in *The Ethnic Groups of Houston*, ed. Fred R. von der Mehden (Houston: Rice University Studies, 1984): 142.
[65] *Jewish Herald* (31 May 1917).
[66] *The Golden Book Of Congregation Adath Yeshurun, 1891-1941* (Houston, 1942): 25; *Jewish Herald* (29 February 1912).
[67] Rockoff, 21.

language, and theatrical performances in Yiddish were rare if well-attended. There was never a Yiddish press in Texas, and the *Jewish Herald* never printed articles or advertisements in any language but English.

Other differences between Houston Jews and their New York counterparts were clear and unmistakable. Whereas Jews were the overwhelming majority on the Lower East Side, Houston Jews never constituted more than 5% of the city's population and were never the majority in any neighborhood or city block. The local vernacular might refer to "Jewish neighborhoods," those areas near the city's synagogues where most of the city's Jews lived, but these areas were in fact overwhelmingly gentile. While immigrants "tended to settle in the same areas as other Jews of their socioeconomic level," writes Elaine Maas, "they still lived in blocks that were predominantly Gentile and thus were in daily contact with Gentiles." Instead of the segregated, ghetto-style arrangement familiar on the Lower East Side, the "Jewish areas," Maas writes, "have always been predominantly Gentile, with perhaps only one to three Jewish families on a block."[68] This pattern prevailed for decades, as did the illusion that Jewish neighborhoods existed in Houston. In 1975, Rabbi Robert Kahn observed that "there are non-Jews living in every Jewish neighborhood." As evidence, he offered his own census of Bellaire High School, which "had a reputation of being a Jewish high school": "People used to say, 'Well, [it] must be half, three-quarters of the kids [there] are Jewish.'" In fact, when Kahn polled one year's graduating class, he found that about 22% of the graduates were Jews, indicating that there

[68] Maas, 142-43.

was "a tendency to cluster" in particular areas, but that Jews did not actually predominate in any area.[69]

In further contrast to conditions in New York, Stuart Rockoff has shown that large numbers of Houston's Jews owned their own businesses: he finds that 32% of Congregation Beth Israel members and 50% of Adath Yeshurun members were business owners, while only 1.5% of Beth Israel's and 5% of Adath Yeshurun's membership were blue-collar workers. This high rate of business ownership, Rockoff asserts, "shows that there was greater economic opportunity for Jews in Houston than in New York," while "Houston did not have enough blue collar workers to fuel a union movement." The economic and political environment in Houston was different from that of the Jewish neighborhoods of New York. "That so many of these stores had a gentile clientele," Rockoff explains, "shows that Jews in Houston were forced to [Americanize] much more than New York Jews because most could not rely solely on the Jewish community for their livelihood." Since Houston's Jewish community "lacked the critical mass necessary to create a self-sufficient community," he concludes, "most Jews had to exist in a gentile world in order to support themselves."[70] While New York offered predominantly Jewish neighborhoods, a wealth of Jewish institutions and facilities, and a large Jewish business clientele. Houston Jews had to be more integrated into gentile society, more dispersed throughout the city in order to survive.

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[69] Louis J. Marchiafava and David Courtwright, interview with Rabbi Robert I. Kahn (6 August 1975), 7, TJHS Box 3A174, Folder 7.
[70] Rockoff, 57-58.

These socio-economic factors underlay Edgar Goldberg's insistence that Texas Jews were different from New Yorkers, but to a great degree his insistence on regional difference was more ideological than practical. He used the rhetoric of regional difference to argue that Jews in Texas and throughout the South stood outside the structures that bound the American Jewish community together. In 1908, an issue arose which the editor exploited to declare the autonomy of Texas Jews and to assert their unwillingness to submit to Northern leadership. As E.M. Browne had done before him, Goldberg challenged the authority of national Jewish leaders and asserted his readers' right to govern themselves. In the place of self-designated Jewish leaders in New York, Goldberg offered up his friend and editorialist, Houston lawyer Henry J. Dannenbaum, as a more suitable leader for American Jewry, an offer which Dannenbaum himself was more than happy to accept.

The matter arose when the police commissioner of New York, Theodore Bingham, published a report in the *North American Review* in which he associated criminality with foreignness: in New York neighborhoods where fewer native-born residents lived, he claimed, crime was more widespread. This logic led Bingham to focus on the Jewish Lower East Side, the most densely populated region of human population on Earth, where the overwhelming majority were immigrants. Russian Jews, according to Bingham, represented one-quarter of the city's population but accounted for "perhaps half of the criminals."[71] Bingham's association of immigrant Jews with crime, while wildly exaggerated, made a

[71] Theodore A. Bingham, "Foreign Criminals in New York," *North American Review* 188 (September 1908): 383.

lasting impression on the American public. The following year, *McClure's Magazine* presented a typically lurid account of the growing problem of "white slavery," a sensationalist term the magazine invented to describe commercial prostitution and its exploitation of young immigrant women. Here George K. Turner described how a system of corrupt procurers, mostly Jews, seduced young immigrant women, also mostly Jews, and sold them into a life of degradation. "In the past ten years," Turner reported, "New York has become the leader of the world in this class of enterprise. The men engaged in it there have taken or shipped girls, largely obtained from the tenement districts of New York, to every continent on the globe."[72] Turner had written a similar article in 1907 about Jewish prostitution in Chicago which, combined with Bingham's report, linked Jewish immigration and vice in the minds of many Americans.[73]

New York's Jewish leaders realized that their community was receiving blame that was out of proportion to the reality. They also recognized that New York was rapidly becoming the world's only Jewish metropolis and that they were in a unique position to act on behalf of all American Jews, not only on the issue of white slavery but on others as well. Calling themselves the New York Kehillah – a term that had originally referred to community leaders, elders, or a town council – these leaders organized themselves to speak and act collectively.

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[72] George Kibbe Turner, "The Daughters of the Poor," *McClure's Magazine* 34 (November 1909): 45.

[73] In fact, there was a substantial amount of Jewish crime in New York and other American cities, and Jews were, indeed, active in organized prostitution at every level, though not necessarily out of proportion to their numbers. Estimates were difficult to make and generally undependable, but one of the most reliable surveys, conducted in New York in 1910, showed Jews to represent 19% of women arrested for prostitution, roughly the same proportion as the Jewish population at that time. Edward J. Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice: The Jewish Fight Against White Slavery, 1870-1939* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983): 162.

The members of the New York Kehillah were almost exclusively from old American Jewish families of German origin. Wealthy, genteel, acculturated, they were respected members of both Jewish and gentile society. Some of them were rabbis; most were lawyers and businessmen; and most were followers of Reform Judaism. When Bingham and Turner published their charges of Jewish involvement in organized prostitution, the Kehillah decided that a determined silence on the subject was the best approach. They feared, in part, that talking about the issue would only draw more attention, further slandering Jewish women's virtue and fanning the flames of anti-Semitism.

Far from the city where most of the alleged offenses were occurring, Henry J. Dannenbaum, an ambitious Jewish lawyer in Houston, saw an opportunity for self-promotion. Dannenbaum wrote a letter to the *Jewish Herald* arguing for a different approach. An energetic and successful prosecutor, Dannenbaum had been active in gaining support in Texas for the Mann Act, which attacked white slavery by prohibiting the transport of women across state lines for "immoral purposes." He had earned the respect of Jews and gentiles alike as a crusading crimefighter, and he would later become the first Jewish judge of the District Court of Texas.[74] A native Texan born to German immigrants, Dannenbaum was simultaneously rough and genteel, educated and mannered but with a frontiersman's directness. In speech and writing he wrapped bold, often confrontational messages in a deliberately cultivated rhetoric that marked him as a true Houstonian, ambitious and capable but newly, somewhat

[74] Dannenbaum's appointment by Governor James Ferguson merited a mention in the *American Israelite* (15 October 1915).

uncomfortably, cosmopolitan. "As if Jews have not enough trouble to fight prejudice from without," he wrote to the *Herald* with typical flourish, "now comes a cancer from within to eat upon our morals and taint our good name. There is work to do for every decent man and woman in our ranks. Only cowards will shrink from the contest."[75] Rather than trying to deny the existence of white slavery, that is, New York leaders should attack it head on.

By the time Dannenbaum wrote his letter to the *Herald*, he had already inserted himself into the fight against white slavery. He initiated a series of meetings with Samuel London, an El Paso lawyer who had represented prostitutes, pimps and procurers throughout the Southwest. London claimed to know more about white slavery than anyone living, and in a sudden burst of lawyerly conscience he approached federal investigators and offered to turn over his meticulous business records and to make his services available to prosecutors for a substantial fee. Anxious to secure this evidence and to aggrandize himself, Dannenbaum sought the help of B'nai B'rith to purchase London's records and to provide him a salary while he gathered further intelligence from his former clients. With London's records in hand, Dannenbaum approached the U.S. Justice Department and procured for himself a position in New York as Special Assistant to the Attorney General, charged with prosecuting violations of the Mann Act.

Dannenbaum's rapid ascent to national office enhanced his reputation among his fellow Jewish Texans and Southerners. As a measure of their respect,

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[75] Henry J. Dannenbaum, "That White Slave Traffic," *Jewish Herald* (12 May 1910).

the members of B'nai B'rith District 7 elected Dannenbaum district president in 1911, a post he accepted and then immediately resigned because of his commitments in New York. Edgar Goldberg praised Dannenbaum lavishly in the *Herald* as "a man whose ability is unquestioned, whose loyalty and faith in the future of our people is inspiring, . . . [a] man without a blemish who is loved, honored and respected by all." In particular, the editor thrilled at the prospect of a local Jew, an officer in their regional B'nai B'rith organization, becoming a leader of national prominence. Dannenbaum's "acknowledged leadership of the district comprising the Southern States," the editor wrote, "is but the stepping stone to the leadership of American Jewry."[76] There is something a bit pathetic in this inflated appeal, as if Goldberg was hopeful, but by no means certain, that New York leaders would accept his man as an equal, let alone agree to anoint him to "the leadership of American Jewry." Goldberg enlarged Dannenbaum into a new Texas hero who would prove that the South could produce leaders capable of standing on a national platform, that Jews living far from cultural centers like New York were not bound to let Northern leaders speak for them.

Goldberg's regionalist rhetoric was based on the belief that Texas was a kind of Jewish Promised Land, a place of unparalleled economic opportunity and good will among people. "While it is doubtful if there is any city in the world that is totally free from prejudice, animosity and petty jealousy, either between Jew and Gentile – Christian and Christian – or Jew and Jew," he wrote in later years, "the situation in Houston and I may say in the State, is one that may well suggest

[76] "Henry J. Dannenbaum," *Jewish Herald* (4 May 1911).

emulation in other sections of the country." Goldberg expressed his pride to have chosen to live "in a community that has accepted me and my people on an equal basis with all other people."[77] What Texas lacked in religious amenities, it made up for in social acceptance, which by implication was lacking in other parts of the country. Goldberg, Dannenbaum and their supporters began from a presumption that Texas was a better home for Jews than New York, and they sought to distance themselves from New York and its Jewish leadership in part to dissociate themselves from its Jewish crime and poverty. Goldberg presented Dannenbaum as more capable to speak for the nation's Jews because he came from a state that was relatively free of the vices that corrupted Jews in Northern cities. To be sure, where there are smaller urban populations there is less urban crime, but Goldberg's breathless support of Dannenbaum, his praise of him as a "man without a blemish who is loved, honored and respected by all," suggests that Goldberg viewed Dannenbaum as the moral superior of his New York counterparts.

In making his case against New York, however, Goldberg studiously ignored the existence of Jewish prositition in Texas. Houses of prostitution, many with Jewish residents, operated in Galveston, Houston, Fort Worth and El Paso, and probably in other Texas cities as well. Rabbi George Fox of Fort Worth noted that in the years of the Galveston Immigration Movement, "Galveston also became the distributing point for prostitutes from both the Old World and South America. Fort Worth was an important railroad center, so that in a comparatively

[77] Edgar Goldberg, "EGO," *Texas Jewish Herald* (10 September 1931).

short time we found a large number of Jewish prostitutes in the city." Their reputation spread, and soon "ranchmen were heard to make remarks in hotels and drugstores about the 'Jew whores.'" Among the first organized activities of Texas chapters of the National Council of Jewish Women were efforts to meet female immigrants at the docks and to help them find safe and respectable work.[78]

It is not surprising that Goldberg should minimize the existence of prostitution in Texas. As the Galveston Movement, which Goldberg heartily endorsed as a boon to Texas commerce, faced accusations that it was a conduit for Jewish prostitutes traveling into the nation's interior, Goldberg deflected the charges by telling his readers that the real problem was somewhere else, particularly in New York. Jewish leaders in Texas, moreover, were willing to confront the problem while their New York colleagues refused to work to eradicate the rampant vices that could harm all American Jews if they spread into the heartland.

Hoping to encourage the Kehillah to act, Dannenbaum corresponded frequently with them while he was with the Justice Department in New York. He approached the group's chairman, Judah Magnes, arguing that the Kehillah should foot the bill for an office on the Lower East Side to serve as a local center for prosecution and public education. He also pressed upon Magnes the importance of publicizing the revelations of Samuel London, the pimps' lawyer from El Paso. Although Magnes welcomed Dannenbaum's interest and showed some enthusiasm for involving the Kehillah, he explained that the members were "hard-

[78] George Fox, "The End of an Era," in Chyet, 280; Ruthe Winegarten interview with Ellen Mack, TJHS Box 3A171, Folder 3. See also Bristow, who cites several reports of Texas vice inspectors regarding illicit activities in Texas.

headed men" who would not easily be moved to act.[79] In fact, as word spread in New York circles of Dannenbaum's alliance with London, a man of questionable intentions and moral character, doors all over the city closed to the Houston lawyer. The effort to establish a bureau on the Lower East Side fizzled, and Magnes declined Dannenbaum's offer of information and financial support, should the Kehillah ever establish a committee to combat the problem.[80] Dannenbaum returned home to Texas late in 1911, disappointed but proud of a letter from the U.S. Attorney General stating that his official efforts had been responsible for at least a dozen convictions.[81]

In January of 1912, Dannenbaum spoke at a B'nai B'rith District 7 meeting in New Orleans, his first public appearance since returning from New York. In a wide-ranging and provocative address, Dannenbaum questioned U.S. diplomatic policy, asserting that the government should not have abrogated a trading treaty with Russia in reaction to the czar's crackdown on Jewish socialists. National Jewish leaders had heartily endorsed, even advocated for the abrogation, and Dannenbaum's condemnation of the step, his apparent support of Russian rather than American policy, outraged many of his listeners and others who would later read of the address. On the subject of white slavery, Dannenbaum insisted that the problem was only getting worse: "The business has spread like a prairie fire until this night," he explained with typical Western imagery, "when in the woman's night court of New York City and on gilded Broadway the majority of

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[79] J.L. Magnes to Henry J. Dannenbaum (25 August 1911), *Jewish Herald* (21 March 1912).
[80] Bristow, 275.
[81] Ibid.

streetwalkers bear Jewish names." America's Jews, he continued, especially their self-proclaimed national leaders, were themselves most responsible for the crisis. While the Southerners of District 7 had distinguished themselves by their "brave and chivalrous and unselfish" efforts to back up Samuel London, the New Yorkers had deserted them: "[P]leading, argument and threats have all fallen impotent at the feet of our leaders in the North."[82]

Edgar Goldberg took Dannenbaum's side immediately. Even as the *Herald* disagreed on several key points in his address, an editorial declared that "we do admire the courage and manliness of Mr. Dannenbaum in differing with what is supposed to be the great majority." The editorial went on to reassert the importance of Southern Jewish leadership. "We admire him for upholding Southern Jewry and telling those of the East that we must be considered; that they cannot decide all questions and expect us to follow without regard to whether it is right or wrong." The South was also capable of producing leaders of national quality, and Dannenbaum was the proof. "Men of the type of Henry J. Dannenbaum are not only qualified to act and represent Southern Jewry," Goldberg argued, "but better qualified to act as leaders of all our people in the consideration of grave questions which confront us today."[83]

Despite Dannenbaum's charges, no one in this debate, of course, was actually *for* white slavery. Dannenbaum, and to only a slightly lesser degree the *Herald*, were engaged in an argument over Jewish leadership, over who was

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[82] "That 'Big Problem': Extracts from New Orleans B'nai B'rith Day Address By Henry J. Dannenbaum," *Jewish Herald* (1 February 1912).
[83] "Editorial," *Jewish Herald* (18 January 1912).

qualified to speak on behalf of American Jewry. Alongside renowned leaders like Louis Marshall and Louis Brandeis, the *Herald* wanted to place Henry Dannenbaum; Dannenbaum himself sought such a position. Northern Jewish leaders, however, dismissed the parvenu out of hand. B'nai B'rith headquarters in Chicago denounced Dannenbaum and issued a disclaimer stating that he held no official position in the Order and did not speak on their behalf. A comment in the *American Hebrew*, a New York paper published by Kehillah member Cyrus Sulzberger, detailed Dannenbaum's futile attempts to raise money among New York leaders and ridiculed his association with Samuel London, a lawyer "who has so little sense of honor as to take such clients in the first place and then sell them out." Titled, with apparent irony, "A Gentleman from Texas," the statement expressed particular disdain toward Dannenbaum's stated wish in his New Orleans address "to speak [his] own mind without regard to New York or Chicago," a statement which, *the American Hebrew* explained, "evidently means without regard to the American Jewish Committee or the B'nai B'rith."[84] The writer worried about the consequences of the divisive speech, claiming that "if the Russian Government had secured the services of the gentleman from Texas, he would have earned his pay" and that B'nai B'rith District 7 should reconsider "whether it desires to retain a man of this kind in an official position in the Order."[85]

In truth, Dannenbaum's comments about America's diplomatic relationship with Russia were reckless and antagonistic. Still, the *American*

[84] "That 'Big Problem'"; "A Gentleman from Texas," *American Hebrew* (26 January 1912).
[85] "A Gentleman from Texas."

Hebrew's response played into Goldberg's hands. The editor reprinted much of the *American Hebrew*'s editorial, and his rhetoric in attacking the Kehillah became more strident.[86] "Our own beloved Henry J. Dannenbaum," one editorial ran, "has caused the displeasure of the syndicate who for years has been in absolute control of the Jewish voice and without whose authority no man dare move." While previously Goldberg had simply defended Dannenbaum as a local hero, he now blasted New York leaders who "dare strike at [him] because he honors truth and detests hypocrisy." Because Dannenbaum had "put aside fear and told the truth," the *Herald* claimed, "he is made the victim of an assault by the American Hebrew which is not alone false but maliciously written for the sole purpose of destroying his value to American Jewry and preserving the syndicate that they might continue to rule." Finally, regarding the suggestion to strip Dannenbaum of his standing in B'nai B'rith, the *Herald* advised the *American Hebrew* that "District 7 will not need the advice or assistance of the syndicate in determining who shall lead in this district. . . . A Texas city gives Henry J. Dannenbaum, and District 7 is proud of its leader."[87]

Such rhetoric exaggerated what had been (and, realistically, what remained) a minor issue and a peripheral conflict into a national dispute of epic proportions. For four consecutive weeks Goldberg dedicated the newspaper's front page to reprinting the correspondence between Dannenbaum and the

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[86] *Jewish Herald* (1 February 1912). Goldberg reprinted Sulzberger's editorial with its heading intact, and Dannenbaum seems to have delighted in the title Sulzberger had given him: in a rebuttal in the *Herald*, Dannenbaum referred to himself repeatedly as "A Gentleman from Texas." *Jewish Herald* (22 February 1912).

[87] *Jewish Herald* (1 February 1912). Dannenbaum wrote regularly for the *Herald* during this period, and, judging from the style and tone of this editorial, it is possible that he wrote it himself.

Kehillah's chairman, Judah Magnes; the editor advised his readers to preserve these pages "as an historical record of a phase of American Jewish history."[88] Underscoring the regional animosities at play in the conflict, Goldberg termed the crisis a "Jewish civil war between the South and the North" and urged that it be "averted before the hostilities assume serious proportions."[89] The *Herald*'s attack on the Kehillah, however, was really a one-sided assault, with Goldberg and Dannenbaum flinging rhetorical grenades at an enemy that was scarcely aware it was at war. It is telling that the Galveston Immigration Movement, under the direction of Kehillah member Jacob Schiff, continued unabated throughout this "Jewish civil war."

In July of 1912, the issue resurfaced when, only a few months after the *Herald*'s barrage against the Kehillah, a police officer killed a Jewish gangster named Herman Rosenthal on a New York street in broad daylight, and the national mainstream press re-opened the issue of Jewish vice with renewed intensity. Faced with a massive public relations disaster, the Kehillah finally formed a committee to address the problem, and the coincidental timing gave the *Jewish Herald* a chance to gloat. Goldberg ran the story of the creation of the Kehillah's new Vigilance Committee on the front page, preceding it with extracts from Dannenbaum's New Orleans address and his correspondence with Magnes, thus implying (quite falsely) that the Kehillah had finally taken Dannenbaum's advice.[90] In another front-page article, Dannenbaum himself took a final shot at

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[88] *Jewish Herald* (22 February 1912).
[89] *Jewish Herald* (8 February 1912).
[90] *Jewish Herald* (29 August 1912).

the Kehillah's tardiness and claimed the high ground for himself and for the newspaper that had supported him. "In no spirit of censure or 'I told you so,' does the Jewish Herald now publish these words," he wrote. "The New York Kehillah, under the splendid leadership of Dr. J.L. Magnes, has been awakened and is on the right track. . . . May they win the fight."[91]

In this instance, Goldberg took his efforts to assert Texas-Jewish autonomy to a ridiculous extreme. Dannenbaum, who by all accounts was an intelligent, capable and forward-thinking man, let his ambition get the better of him. The two encouraged one another, as Goldberg placed Dannenbaum on a pedestal he scarcely deserved, and Dannenbaum took advantage of Goldberg's inflated rhetoric to advance his own national standing. Nevertheless, Goldberg saw the outcome of the Kehillah fight as a victory, a sign that Texas-Jewish leaders were stronger and saw further than the "syndicate" in New York. But times were changing: with the outbreak of World War I, the political ground shifted radically beneath the editor's feet. The Great War ravaged regions of Europe where large numbers of Jews lived and displaced hundreds of thousands of them. Refugees fled westward into Germany and Austria, crowding into dismal shantytowns where they died in large numbers from starvation and disease. American Jews recognized a responsibility and organized charities to collect money for the relief of Jewish war victims. Many of these charities, representing a broad range of American Jewish ideologies, merged into the American Joint Distribution Committee, or "the Joint," and as stories of Jewish suffering

[91] *Jewish Herald* (11 September 1912).

proliferated, local agencies throughout the United States sprang up to gather donations for the Joint. The groundswell overcame even the most rancorous differences that had existed among American Jews before the war. Zionist and anti-Zionist, Reform and Orthodox, German and Russian Jews eagerly joined the campaign.

There was little enthusiasm for debates between Southern and Northern Jews at a time when both Jewish and American loyalty required cooperation and unity. Once an advocate of regional divisiveness, Goldberg now chastised his readers for not participating actively enough in a united national campaign. He turned the pages of the *Herald* into a forum for facilitating donations, and he accepted checks at his office to forward to representatives of the Joint. A similar change occurred throughout the country. World War I and the institutional campaigns to support it marked a turning point in relations between local communities and national organizations, creating for the first time a strong sense of national solidarity among American Jews. The advocacy of spokesmen like Edgar Goldberg for a more localized view of Jewish life was effectively over, swept up in a patriotic fervor of which Jews across the country were obliged to be a part.

Chapter 5. Texas Jews and the Ku Klux Klan

J.D. Van Winkle, Grand Cyclops of the Dallas klavern of the Ku Klux Klan, was having a wonderful day. Standing at a podium on the State Fairgrounds, he addressed a crowd of 1,500 fellow Klansmen, many of whom had come from all over Texas and Oklahoma in chartered trains and automobile caravans to his city to be part of his day: Klan Day at the Texas State Fair, October 24, 1923. The program was filled with speeches and spectacle in honor of his organization. Delegations of Klansmen from San Antonio and Wichita Falls included brass bands to belt out patriotic songs. Rodeo riders performed in Klan regalia. And at the Fair's grandstand, in the evening, twenty hippodrome acts featuring acrobats, tumblers and aerialists entertained the crowd until well after dark, when some 7,000 Klansmen gathered for a cross-burning and initiation ceremony witnessed by more than 25,000 non-Klan spectators. The "pageant," as the *Dallas Morning News* described it, "proved to be the most colorful and unique event and one of the most massive ever seen in the city of Dallas."[1]

The first event of the day was a virtual tribute to the Cyclops himself, under whose leadership the Dallas klavern had raised about $80,000 to refurbish Hope Cottage, a local home for orphaned and abandoned children. "We point to this completed institution," Van Winkle announced proudly as he prepared to deliver the check, "as a demonstration of the fact that we have been doing constructive work within the last eighteen months instead of indulging in river-

[1] "Great Throngs Participate in Colorful Klan Initiation at Fair Park," *Dallas Morning News* (25 October 1923).

bottom floggings, as our enemies would have the public believe." Behind him on the platform, an illustrious group laughed with him. His close friend, Imperial Wizard Hiram Evans, a Dallas dentist who had risen to the Klan's highest national office, had returned from his Atlanta headquarters for a triumphant homecoming. He was joined by a host of public officials, including Dallas Mayor Louis Blaylock, who praised the Klan "in its present period of greatness," and Judge Felix Robertson, who would soon make a credible showing as a pro-Klan candidate for governor. Flanking them were a flock of city commissioners, county officials, and state legislators who owed their offices to Klan support. Finally, in a position of prominence behind the speaker, sat Alex Sanger, the city's leading merchant and head of one of the state's premier retailing families; a respected civic leader; a member of the State Fair Board of Directors; and a founding member of Temple Emanu-El, the city's first synagogue. [2]

With such an assemblage gathered behind him, Van Winkle found it easy to assure his listeners that "the day is yours, the city is yours – and I am glad to state that you are in a klan town."[3] Dallas was a Klan town. As many as 13,000 of its citizens were members of the "Invisible Empire," possibly the highest per capita participation of any city in the country; with only 4% of the Texas population, Dallas supplied some 13% of its Klansmen.[4] Not only was the Imperial Wizard a native Dallasite, but so were the National Vice Commander of

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[2] "Hope Cottage Is Dedicated By Klan," *Dallas Morning News* (25 October 1923).
[3] Ibid.
[4] Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967): 79, 265-66n.12; David Ritz, "Inside the Jewish Establishment," *D, The Magazine of Dallas* 2 (November 1975): 53.

the Women of the Ku Klux Klan and the Grand Titan of Texas, the head of the state organization.[5] The collection of current and future public officials arrayed behind Van Winkle at the Hope Cottage ceremony testified to the chapter's success at getting sympathetic candidates elected to local offices, and the participation of Alex Sanger suggested that even the city's Jews had found something to admire in the self-proclaimed fraternal and patriotic organization.

For many Texas Jews, however, the presence of the city's leading Jewish citizen at the head of a public event celebrating the charitable and benevolent works of the Ku Klux Klan was, to say the least, ironic. "I can't answer your question concerning brother Alex Sanger sitting on the platform at the Hope Cottage dedication," wrote Emanu-El's ever-politic rabbi, David Lefkowitz, to a friend in Tyler. "You will have to come over and ask him."[6] Sanger himself never offered an explanation for his participation in Klan Day: Gerry Cristol, the archivist of Temple Emanu-El, has noted Sanger's "close connection to every single civic endeavor in the city," pointing out that he also had been seated at the podium the year before at the meeting that created the anti-Klan Dallas County Citizens League.[7] Journalist David Ritz is less circumspect, attributing Sanger's participation in Klan Day to the fact that "the German Jewish leanings toward

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[5] The Women of the Ku Klux Klan was an auxiliary to the main organization, and its members shared the men's political agenda. As historian Kathleen Blee has written, however, "the women's Klan of the 1920s was not only a way to promote racist, intolerant, and xenophobic policies but also a social setting in which to enjoy their own racial and religious privileges. These women recall their membership in one of U.S. history's most vicious campaigns of prejudice and hatred primarily as a time of friendship and solidarity among like-minded women." Kathleen M. Blee, *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991): 1.

[6] Quoted in Ritz, 53.

[7] Gerry Cristol, *A Light In The Prairie* (Ft. Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1998): 99.

assimilation and accommodation had brought men like Sanger to the point of actually aiding and comforting their enemies."[8]

Whatever his reasons, Sanger's participation in the Hope Cottage event illustrated a deep ambivalence on the part of Jewish Texans toward the Ku Klux Klan, which achieved an unprecedented degree of social and political influence in the early 1920s. Under Imperial Wizard Evans's leadership, the group denounced its violent past and tried to present itself as a legitimate benevolent society that honored the principles of "100% Americanism." The Klan had thus attracted a number of reputable men and women who may or may not have supported the more obscure racialist points of the group's agenda. "Many of America's good citizens were members," recalled the editor of the *Texas Jewish Herald* in 1933. "While many low liars and ignoramuses were also members of the Klan, many of the misguided were men of high standing and respectability."[9] Max Bentley, who wrote about the Texas Klan for *McClure's Magazine*, claimed that the "initial roster" of the Houston chapter "represented literally a glossary of Houston's *who's who*. The charter members were silk-stocking men from the banks, business houses and professions."[10] Duncan Aikman, a reporter for the *El Paso Times*, described Klan membership in his city as consisting of "motor-car magnates, the insurance go-getters, the real-torian archdukes, the slap-on-the-back bankers, the high powered selling dervishes, [and] the dynamic contractors," a

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[8] Ritz, 53.
[9] Edgar Goldberg, "EGO," *Texas Jewish Herald* (9 November 1933).
[10] Max Bentley, "The Ku Klux Klan in Texas," *McClure's Magazine* 57 (May 1924): 14-15.

collection of "massed and gullible Babbittry."[11] The Klan drew its members from the solid, striving middle-class, from among the friends and professional associates of Jewish businessmen, as well as from their neighbors and customers. These were not people who had expressed much anti-Semitic feeling in the past, and Texas Jews had little reason to fear them; in fact, Jewish businessmen may have felt that they risked more by standing opposed to such an organization and alienating the people on whom business depended than in finding a way to coexist peacefully.

On a personal level, Klansmen gave their Jewish neighbors little reason to fear them. Examples abound of Texas Jews enjoying cordial, even friendly relationships with Klan members. When Klansmen first marched in Houston in 1921, they wore robes and hoods bought from a Jewish manufacturer for $1.50 apiece.[12] John Rosenfield, a Jewish reporter for the *Dallas Morning News* who later became the paper's arts editor and one of the city's most influential cultural figures, began his career covering Klan picnics for the paper. Fred Florence, one of the Dallas's leading bankers, was a longtime friend of Zeke Marvin, the head of the Texas Klan.[13] And during a recruitment drive in Dallas, a group of Klansmen visited Edward Titche, the Jewish head of the Titche-Goettinger department store, to invite him to join the organization. Titche was obliged to

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[11] Duncan Aikman, "Prairie Fire," *American Mercury* 6 (October 1925): 214. While Aikman is credited with the authorship of this article, the style is reminiscent of the *American Mercury*'s editor, H.L. Mencken.
[12] Bentley, 14.
[13] Ritz, 53-54.

explain to *them* why he could not, to which one of the Klansmen replied that it was a shame, Titche would have made a fine recruiter.[14]

Despite such gestures of good will, however, the Klan's drive into the mainstream concealed a potentially explosive anti-Semitism. Just hours, in fact, after sharing the platform with Alex Sanger at Klan Day, Imperial Wizard Hiram Evans delivered an address that confirmed Jewish fears about his organization's real agenda. From the Fairground's main plaza, where some 75,000 Klansmen, many in full regalia, were gathered to listen, Evans proclaimed that Jews represented an "absolutely unblendable element" in American society. "Throughout the centuries," he declared, "there has been no country [the Jew] would or could call his home. . . . To him patriotism, as the Anglo-Saxon feels it, is impossible." Evans's concern was not that Jews were inferior or unacceptable as part of American society: on the contrary he praised them as "law abiding," "of physically wholesome stock," "untainted by immoralities among themselves," "mentally alert," and "a family people." Rather he condemned them for failing to integrate fully enough, for remaining separate and self-protective. "Their homes are not American, but Jewish homes," he said, "into which we can not go and from which they will never emerge for a real intermingling with America."[15] The previous year, Billie Mayfield, editor of *Colonel Mayfield's Weekly*, a Klan paper in Houston, had expressed a similar opinion. "The Jew is not a citizen of this

[14] Ritz, 54.
[15] "Imperial Wizard of Klan Says Immigration America's Big Problem," *Dallas Morning News* (25 October 1923).

country," he wrote. "He is just an Inhabitant. . . . [Jews] come to America, the great melting pot of the world, with the avowed intention of never melting."[16]

Opinions like these, which reminded Jews and non-Jews alike that there was something different, something "absolutely unblendable" about Jewish identity, indicated that with the rise of the Texas Klan in the 1920s, Texas Jews were in a new and dangerous situation. By pointing out that white skin might no longer be enough to assure Jews a place in the power structure, the Klan suggested that at any time the white gentile majority could condemn Jews as foreigners or outcasts because they were not Anglo-Saxon and Christian as well as white, because they insisted on a minimal degree of unacculturated self-segregation. The Klan forced Texas Jews to reconsider the interior frontiers that had defined who they were and where they fit in Texas society: as whites who had entered the state's power structure more quickly than other minorities, many felt obliged to support the Klan during its meteoric rise to political power; as Jews, however, they could not endorse an organization that was officially committed to the principles of Anglo-Saxon Christian supremacy. This internal crisis became overt when the Klan made inroads into legitimate politics, successfully running candidates for the state's highest offices. Jewish voters had to choose between agonizing options reflecting competing elements of their own identities: Klan candidates who expressed views they otherwise supported; or weak, obscure, even overtly anti-Semitic candidates who spoke out against the Klan. "Politics these days have ceased to operate on lines of principle and patriotism & Efficiency,"

[16] *Colonel Mayfield's Weekly* (25 February 1922). Capitalization as in the original.

wrote the editor of the *Texas Jewish Herald* at the height of the Klan's political influence, "but rather expediency."[17] Finding the expedient option was exceedingly difficult, though, when Jews had to choose between parts of themselves.

What exactly constituted "100% Americanism" was, of course, a point of frequent disagreement: could not Jews and other minorities be "100% Americans" without being Christians or Anglo-Saxons? A document titled "A Klansmen's Creed," which was reprinted regularly in Klan newspapers to remind the membership of what they stood for and who they were, laid out explicitly the group's limited definition of "American." According to the creed, a Klansman had to believe "in God and the tenets of the Christian religion"; hold "no allegiance to any foreign government, emperor, king, pope or any other foreign, political or religious power"; support "the limitation of foreign immigration"; and be "a native-born American citizen" – requirements that immediately barred Jews, Catholics, and foreign-born Americans, respectively, from the rolls of potential members. In addition, every new recruit was required to swear to "most zealously and valiantly shield and preserve" a laundry list of values, including "white supremacy."[18] It was clear that the principles of "100% Americanism" excluded a great many Americans and left open the possibility that Jews, Catholics, blacks and immigrants could become targets of Klan hostility or even violence. The Klan suggested that Jews would no longer be permitted to remain

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[17] Edgar Goldberg to Henry Cohen (8 July 1924). Henry Cohen Papers, Box 3M241, CAH. Capitalization as in the original.
[18] Stanley Frost, *The Challenge of the Klan* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1923): 49.

Jews within white society: by challenging them to assimilate or lose their status as "100% Americans," the Klan forced them to identify themselves as *either* whites *or* Jews.

Before the Klan, gentile Texans had seemed to accept Jews readily and to welcome them into their business, community and social circles.[19] This was especially apparent during the state's frontier period, when people of all kinds were generally accepted as part of the natural mix. In 1879, Charles Wessolowsky of the *Jewish South* reported from Denison that "[t]here exists but little of that spirit of prejudice and intolerance here, which is unhappily so prevalent elsewhere."[20] The comments of Robin McMillion about the family of Abraham Alexander, who arrived in the state around 1850, are also typical. "During the more than 120 years that the Alexander parents, children and grandchildren were residents of LaGrange," McMillion writes, "there was never any persecution of them because of their Jewish faith. There was no social isolation, no rude remarks or jokes made about them. According to Miss

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[19] A notable exception to this rule is the prohibition on Jewish membership maintained by many Texas country and social clubs even as late as the 1970s, when David Ritz noted that "Even today certain institutions of Dallas society – the Idlewild, the Dallas Country Club, Brookhollow, Northwood and perhaps one or two others – have kept their doors closed to Jews." Not all "gentile" clubs excluded Jews, but Jews in both Dallas and Houston established Jewish country clubs in the late nineteenth century, which Stanley Marcus attributed to "the 'no Jews' policy of the fashionable country clubs." Julius Schepps, another of Dallas's most influential Jewish citizens, refused to attend social events at venues, including the prestigious Petroleum Club, that discriminated against Jews, occasionally triggering the resentment of gentile friends and business associates. Ritz, 108; Stanley Marcus, *Minding the Store: A Memoir* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1974): 245; Julius Schepps to Mr. and Mrs. James F. Chambers, Jr. (24 September 1965), Julius Schepps Papers, AJA Small Collection 10825; Mrs. George Golman, Interview with Robert Cullum, "Interviews with Various Associates of Julius Schepps," AJA Small Collection 10825.

[20] Charles Wessolowsky, *Reflections Of Southern Jewry: The Letters Of Charles Wessolowsky, 1878-1879*, ed. Louis Schmier (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1982): 121.

Jeannette, the last surviving child of Abraham, she and her family were 'good friends with everybody.'"[21] Henry Cohen maintained a decades-long relationship, "the closest friendship of the Rabbi's life," with Father James Kirwin, leader of Galveston's majority Catholic population, and Ike Kempner served in a number of appointed and elected positions in the city, including that of mayor.[22] In the small town of Dublin, the Novit family was often invited to church picnics, where one of them honored requests to sing Yiddish songs.[23] And in Laredo, a Jewish woman served as postmaster in the early 1920s, receiving an appointment from her congressman.[24]

In Dallas, the Sanger family symbolized the Jewish commitment to Americanization and to the social acceptance and economic benefits it could provide. Three brothers, Isaac, Lehman and Philip, arrived in Texas from Bavaria before the Civil War and established a series of retail stores in towns along the Houston & Texas Central Railroad. Needing extra hands as their business grew, they brought over the rest of the family – four more brothers, three sisters and their parents – whom they dispatched as necessary to open and manage new stores. When the railroad reached Dallas in 1872, Alexander Sanger supervised the opening of the firm's flagship store, becoming part of a growing class of Jewish businessmen in a booming city. Of the forty-two men Gerry Cristol identified as Jews in the 1875 city directory, twenty-three were merchants; eleven

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[21] Robin McMillion, "The Abraham Alexander Family," TJHS Box 3A164, Folder 2.
[22] Anne Nathan and Harry I. Cohen, *The Man Who Stayed in Texas: The Life of Rabbi Henry Cohen* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1941): 142.
[23] Jan Hart, "Annie, the Immigrant," TJHS Box 3A167, Folder 1.
[24] Untitled biographical account of Solomon Charles Freed, TJHS Box 3A164, Folder 6.

were clerks; and two were peddlers, but Sanger Brothers was by far the most successful of their establishments.[25] By 1885, Alex and his brother Philip owned two of the most opulent residences in the city, where they regularly entertained globally renowned artists, writers, and musicians such as Oscar Wilde, Sinclair Lewis, Jascha Heifetz, and Vladimir Horowitz.[26] Sanger Brothers itself became a nursery for Dallas retailing giants: Herbert Marcus, who later joined his sister Carrie and her husband Al Neiman to found Neiman-Marcus, began as a shoe clerk on the Sangers' sales floor, and his wife, Minnie, would later remember the Sangers as "the finest people" and the "very epitome of royalty."[27]

The Sangers and other Dallas Jewish businessmen participated in the highest echelons of civic power, and they helped to nurture the city's peculiarly striving character. When Charles Wessolowsky visited Dallas on behalf of the *Jewish South* in 1879, he singled out Sanger Brothers as "an establishment of grandeur, taste and elegance, equal to any in the South" which "is visited daily by a throng of people." Throughout the city he noted "gigantic structures, mammoth and extensive business houses, grand and spacious establishments, elegant and beautiful residences, [and] large and commodious hotels."[28] The citizens of Dallas struck Wessolowsky as uniquely determined:

> [The visitor to Dallas] finds a city with all modern improvements, her citizens thrifty and energetic people, wide-awake and with exceptional enterprise, beautifying and adorning the city and extending their might, energy and perseverance for the speedy development and growth of their

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[25] Cristol, 16.
[26] Leon Harris, *Merchant Princes: An Intimate History of Jewish Families Who Built Great Department Stores* (New York: Kodansha International, 1994 [1979]): 163.
[27] Quoted in Cristol, 45.
[28] Wessolowsky, 115.

> material interest, and are in every respect using their efforts and zeal to make Dallas the Venice of Texas. And with the knowledge that in the lexicon of the leading enterprises of the day there is 'no such word as fail,' we feel assured that all undertakings of Dallas, will be of great utility, beauty and profit. [29]

Among these ambitious citizens were some 500 Jews who, "in their various avocations and stations of life," Wessolowsky observed, "are aiding vastly in bringing about the desired success for Dallas." Some of them enjoyed "the reputation and fame of doing the largest and most extensive business in the city," he wrote. They "are enjoying the respect and friendship of the Gentile community and are participating largely in every measure, that is tending toward advancing the welfare of the city."[30]

The Sangers, especially Alex, were comfortable among the city's power elite. "I was associated with a jolly crowd of businessmen," Alex remembered, "all united on all questions that affected the prosperity of Dallas."[31] Sanger involved himself in a successful effort to expand the city's railroad connections; served as president of the fire department; won election as a city alderman by a vote that would have been unanimous had Sanger himself not "gallantly voted for his opponent"; handled funds for the Dallas Public Library; helped to found the Texas State Fair and Exposition; hosted banquets for out-of-town investors; and in 1917 became the first Jewish member of the University of Texas Board of Regents.[32] No other Dallas Jew was as successful or as civically active as Sanger,

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[29] Ibid.
[30] Wessolowsky, 115-16.
[31] Frank Marion Cockrell, "History of Early Dallas," *Dallas Sunday News* (15 May 1932), quoted in Cristol, 9.
[32] Cristol, 11, 40-41.

but he represented what Wessolowsky had observed, a general sentiment that Jews and gentiles alike considered Jews an important part of the city and its public affairs.

But the rise of the Klan in the 1920s spoke to Jews' deepest fears about white Texans' attitudes and the potential danger they presented; if their relations with Christians were genial on the surface, many Texas Jews remained fearful that feelings were not so friendly beneath. Leonard Dinnerstein has observed that Southern Jews in general "were accepted if they did nothing to disturb community tranquility," but that "even when conditions seemed placid Jews could never feel completely comfortable."[33] Elaine Maas, who has studied the Jewish community of Houston, made a similar observation, noting that "Houston Jews have always perceived Houston as having a relatively low level of anti-Semitism," but that nevertheless, "most adult Jews feel that it exists as a latent possibility."[34] In Beaumont, "the community-at-large accepted our ability to serve the needs of the community," Carrie Chazan Leichtman recalled, and "[t]here were no signs of overt anti-Semitism, although I remember that the undercurrent of anti-Jewish feeling was present."[35] And Lionel Koppman of Waco has written that anti-Semitism in his city "was both open and hidden. Our neighbors were polite, but I

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[33] Leonard Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994): 177.
[34] Elaine H. Maas, "Jews," in *The Ethnic Groups of Houston*, ed. Fred R. von der Mehden (Houston: Rice University Studies, 1984): 155.
[35] Carrie Chazan Leichtman, "Carrie Chazan Leichtman – Beaumont, Texas," in Howard V. Epstein, *Jews In Small Towns: Legends And Legacies* (Santa Rosa, Cal.: Vision Books International, 1997): 668.

don't recall ever having been invited into their homes, although they were invited into ours."[36]

Overt anti-Semitic speech was rare in Texas, and actions even more so, unless one looks at examples among children, who are less capable of subtlety or polite cordiality than adults. "We didn't feel 'different' from any of our classmates," wrote Vera Remer, who grew up in the only Jewish family in Henderson, Texas, "until the day a neighbor boy who was our age called us 'Jew Baby!'. . . We didn't suffer any physical harm but the others let us know that we were 'different.' We were often quite isolated because we were 'The Jews.'"[37] Such ostracism could be painful. When the children next door to Lionel Koppman in Waco stopped coming over for visits, Lionel's mother asked why, and they replied, "Because you're Jewish, and mother said that we can't come to your house."[38] At times conflicts among children became violent. Evelynn Lois Ray, who grew up in San Angelo, remembered only a single incident of anti-Semitism, which occurred after she made friends with the daughter of a new gentile family in town: "The daughter and I, with my sister and another friend, were playing, and when the fact that we were Jewish came up, a stone was thrown at my head. . . . Yes, I still carry the scar."[39] Aaron Spelling, the television producer, grew up in Dallas and once claimed to have suffered a nervous breakdown at the age of nine because of anti-Semitic taunting from fellow students. "I just couldn't take being chased home from school and getting my

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[36] Lionel Koppman, "What I Remember," (12 May 1985): 3, AJA Biographies File.
[37] Mrs. Vera Remer to Don Teter, TJHS Box 3A166, Folder 3.
[38] Koppman, 3.
[39] Evelynn Lois Ray, "Evelynn Lois Ray – San Angelo, Texas," in Epstein, 676.

butt kicked every day," he said. "My mother had to take me to school and take me home."[40] The actions of children, of course, mean little in and of themselves: children will use any perceived difference as a source of insult and need little incentive to throw rocks at each other. But children learn from their parents, and these incidents suggest that anti-Semitic speech, rooted in a perception of fundamental differences between Jews and everyone else, occurred inside gentile homes even if it rarely appeared in public among adults.

Such prejudice among white gentiles could have pushed Jews toward social identification with other racial and ethnic minorities, who experienced much more overt discrimination, but there is little evidence that such affiliation occurred in Texas. When living in communities with African-American and Mexican-American populations, Jews remained entirely part of the dominant white society, suggesting that other whites permitted Jews into their social circles and that Jews chose to enter them. In fact, the very diversity of Texas society may have mitigated the differences among categories of whites. "We had a population of white, black, Mexicans, and Indians," Evelynn Lois Ray recalled, "and we all respected each other and showed it." As Jews, she said, her family was "never treated differently because there were too many different ethnic groups in San Angelo. There were business people, ranchers, farmers, oil men, Mexican pickers – everyone was different in his own way."[41] Such warm feelings did not, as Ray described, prevent a gentile child from throwing rocks at

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[40] Leah Garchik, "Personalities," *Austin American Statesman* (7 May 1990). Garchik is quoting a television interview Spelling gave to talk-show host Bob Costas.
[41] Ray, 676, 678.

her, but her comments do suggest that among whites, especially those of similar economic class, religious distinctions were less apparent than the differences among racial groups and between middle- and working-class people.

Though affiliating socially with other whites, Texas Jews exhibited relatively little of the racial bigotry that often characterized other white Texans, and many maintained close business relations with black and Mexican-American employees and customers. The Popular Store of El Paso, owned and managed by one of the city's original Jewish families, built success on the strength of its "one-price" policy, advertised on the store's billboards: "You pay what your neighbor pays. No discounts, no favorites. One price to all alike." The Popular was also the first major retailer in El Paso to hire African-American floor workers, and Hispanics constituted the majority of the store's employees.[42] Albert Granoff, who began his Laredo retail business by selling Catholic pictures and religious items in Latino neighborhoods, found that his Spanish-speaking clients were "sympathetic" and reliable customers, and he and his partner "became enthusiastic and worked more among the Mexican people than among the Negroes or whites."[43] Jimmy Wagner, a black resident of Corpus Christi, suggested that minorities treated in this way remembered it and preferred to shop in Jewish establishments. Entering a Christian-owned department store to buy a pair of shoes, Wagner recalled that "[t]hey were not friendly. They said 'Boy.

[42] Floyd S. Fierman, *The Schwartz Family of El Paso: The Story of a Pioneer Jewish Family in the Southwest* (El Paso: University of Texas at El Paso Texas Western Press, 1980): 19, 48.
[43] Albert L. Granoff, "To America with Love," AJA Small Collection 4215.

What you doin' here?'" Wagner walked out. "[I] went to Lichtenstein's, and was treated courteously. I remember that just as plain as day."[44]

But however attentive they might have been to black and Latino associates, Texas Jews always saw themselves as whites: in the state's peculiar racial algebra one was either Anglo, African-American or Mexican, so Jews could clearly be nothing else. "The schools were very segregated," remembered Julius Leshin of Robstown. "Through the sixth grade the Hispanic children attended a separate school, and the few black children attended a separate black school," while white children, including Jews like Leshin, attended the white school.[45] In the town of Luling, Milford Jacobs not only attended white schools in the segregated district, but his father served as president of the school board and in the early 1920s helped direct the construction of "a nice brick school for the black children near the old Luling Jewish Cemetery." Students and their families were so pleased with the structure, Jacobs says, that when they dedicated the building "they had a picture in the Assembly Room of Booker T. Washington and one of Leon Jacobs on each side of George Washington's picture."[46] Jews might sympathize with the racial minorities in their communities and might treat them with somewhat more respect than did other whites, but despite the occasional slights they received at the hands of individual gentiles, Texas Jews as a group never identified with them or defined themselves as a persecuted minority. The

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[44] Hollace Ava Weiner, "Rabbi Sidney Wolf: Harmonizing in Texas," in Mark K. Bauman and Berkley Kalin, eds., *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights, 1880s to 1990s* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997): 130.
[45] Julius Leshin, "Julius Leshin – Robstown, Texas," in Epstein, 670.
[46] Milford U. Jacobs, "Milford U. Jacobs – Luling, Texas," in Epstein, 663.

arrival of the Klan in Texas, however, seemed to threaten the status quo and forced Jews to reconsider the security they felt they had achieved as white Texans and as Americans.

The Ku Klux Klan first appeared in Pulaski, Tennessee, in 1866, as a motley collection of drunken Confederate veterans who felt that Southern dignity and the virtue of Southern womanhood demanded protection from the Yankees, carpetbaggers, and freedmen in their midst. Acting without organization or method during the years of Reconstruction, they roamed the Southern countryside terrorizing former slaves and Northern sympathizers, finally running out of steam and disappearing in the early 1870s. In contrast, the "Second Klan," which appeared in 1915, was wholly mainstream, a secret society self-consciously called into being in Atlanta by a nostalgic former traveling salesman and circuit preacher named William Simmons. Simmons had been keenly affected by that year's release of D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, which romanticized the Reconstruction-era Klan, and he hoped to model his new organization on Griffith's idealized version of the past. The same year, also in Atlanta, a mob lynched Leo Frank, a Jewish manager who was falsely condemned for the murder of Mary Phagan, a young Christian girl who worked in his pencil factory. Some of the original membership of Simmons's organization may have come from anti-Frank (and by extension, anti-Semitic) groups like the Knights of Mary Phagan

who were looking for another outlet once their "justice" against Frank was accomplished.[47]

Despite its romantic origins, the "Invisible Empire" that Simmons conceived resembled the disorganized mobs of Reconstruction in name only. He imagined his group along the lines of middle-class fraternal societies like the Masons and Odd Fellows – Simmons himself belonged to no fewer than twenty-five such societies – and he imposed a strict institutional hierarchy resembling theirs, with himself at the top.[48] Simmons modeled his order's famous costumes on the ones in Griffith's film, and he invented, mostly from whole cloth, the mystical rituals, secret signs, specialized vocabulary, oaths, and initiation rites that gave the new Empire its hocus-pocus appeal.

But, as Nancy MacLean writes, "Klansmen were not just Odd Fellows in robes and hoods": the centrality of white supremacy as a motivating force set the Klan apart from contemporary social clubs.[49] In its first years, this theme was quiet and generally benign; the Klan's white Protestant exclusiveness, their patriotism and proclamations of "100% Americanism," were not unlike the platforms of other fraternal organizations with which the new Klansmen were

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[47] In 1925, Ward Greene, writing in the *American Mercury*, suggested that the Frank lynching and the rise of the Klan both occurred because Southerners were "sentimental patriots . . . even to the point of fanaticism," but he does not assert that one arose directly from the other. Historian Nancy MacLean acknowledges the "popular myth" that some of the Second Klan's "founding members . . . included some of the Knights of Mary Phagan," but she asserts that "no one has ever documented a direct connection between the two." Ward Greene, "Notes for a History of the Klan," *American Mercury* 5 (June 1925): 242-43; Nancy MacLean, *Behind The Mask Of Chivalry: The Making Of The Second Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994): 12.

[48] Such lodges and fraternal societies were enormously popular in the years after World War I. By one estimate, the nation had more than 600 secret societies by the mid-1920s that enlisted more than 30 million members. MacLean, 6-7.

[49] MacLean, 11.

familiar. With the United States's entrance into World War I, however, the order found a new moral purpose. Under the flag of "100% Americanism," they began speaking and acting out against anyone they felt was a threat to the nation's war effort or to the wholesomeness of the society that American soldiers were fighting to protect. In one instance, Klansmen violently intervened in a shipyard strike in Mobile, Alabama, and they regularly ratted out strike leaders, draft dodgers, and seditionists.[50]

Even with the war as a catalyst, though, Simmons's early success was limited. By 1920 the order had enlisted only a few thousand dues-paying members, and Simmons began searching for ways to make his society more broadly appealing. In the summer of 1920, Edward Clarke and Elizabeth Tyler, partners in an Atlanta firm called the Southern Publicity Association which had handled fund drives for the Anti-Saloon League, the Red Cross, the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Fund, and Near-East relief, joined Simmons to direct his Empire's public relations operation. As historian David Chalmers has written, Clarke and Tyler pushed the group away from Simmons's "lip-service to the traditional racial values of the white South" into "a pyrotechnically aggressive defense of one-hundred-per-cent-Americanism."[51] At the urging of his partners, Simmons left placidity behind in a speech before a group of Georgia Klansmen in late 1920. Standing silently before the crowd, he methodically removed a pair of handguns from his pockets and laid them on a table. He then unwrapped a

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[50] Jackson, 7.

[51] David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987): 32.

cartridge belt from around his waist and arranged it on the table. Then, he drew a Bowie knife and plunged it enthusiastically into the tabletop, declaring "Now let the Niggers, Catholics, Jews, and all others who disdain my imperial wizardry, come on!"[52] In 1921, some 200 new chapters appeared nationwide, boosting membership to somewhere near one million. At its peak in 1924, the order claimed as many as 4.5 million members, though it regularly inflated its membership estimates.[53]

The Klan reached Texas in late 1920 in the person of Z.R. Upchurch, a Klan functionary from Atlanta who traveled to Houston to exploit a meeting of the United Confederate Veterans as a starting point for adding Texas to the growing Invisible Empire. Within a few days, Upchurch had mustered the numbers necessary to establish the first Texas chapter, Sam Houston Klan No. 1. Word spread quickly, and new chapters appeared in rapid succession. Within six months more than 100 "klaverns" appeared in cities and towns across Texas, and by 1924 the state organization reached a peak membership of some 200,000, a figure more than six times the state's entire Jewish population.[54]

As membership rosters swelled, Klan organizers recognized that the nativist arguments that made the order popular in Eastern states, where the economic effects of immigration were strongly felt, were harder to sell in Texas where foreign-born white residents numbered less than 8% of the white

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[52] Quoted in Chalmers, 32-33.
[53] Frost, 142.
[54] Bentley, 16; *American Jewish Yearbook*.

population in 1920.[55] In 1923, the editor of *Colonel Mayfield's Weekly* noted the state's relatively small numbers of Catholics and Jews and shrugged off their voting strength.[56] Under these conditions, it was difficult for Klan leaders in Texas to sell the idea that Jews, Catholics and immigrants represented a serious threat to the white majority's way of life. "Although anti-Catholicism and anti-Semitism were important in the kluxing of the Southwest," Charles Alexander, who has written extensively about Klan activity in Texas, has shown, "these prejudices were not as prominent in that region as in the East or Midwest." While national leaders talked often of the "unblendable" Jewish character, "outside of such eastern states as New York or New Jersey, anti-Semitism seems to have had only moderate appeal [to Klansmen]."[57] The relative lack of overt anti-Semitism within the Texas Klan, then, almost certainly made it more acceptable to Texas Jews like Alex Sanger.

Therefore, instead of defining "100% Americanism" as a matter of religion or nationality, the Texas Klan emphasized patriotism and moral order. As Charles Alexander has written, the Texas Klan was not motivated primarily by "a nativistic impulse" but by "a desire for social regulation," and so Texas Klan activity was a singular "adventure in moral authoritarianism and politics."[58] Ralph

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[55] Charles C. Alexander, *Crusade For Conformity: The Ku Klux Klan In Texas, 1920- 1927* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1959): 28.

[56] *Colonel Mayfield's Weekly* (24 November 1923). When Klan commentators like Mayfield spoke of Catholics, they generally meant white, rather than Mexican-American, Catholics. Klansmen rarely acknowledged the state's Mexican-American population. Even their comments about the dangers of immigration tended to focus on European immigration and took little notice of migration across the Mexican border.

[57] Charles C. Alexander, *The Ku Klux Klan In The Southwest* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1966): 25-26.

[58] Alexander, *Crusade*, iv.

Chase, who grew up in San Angelo, remembered the local Klan lashing out against a litany of social evils, including "short skirts, demon rum, prostitutes, bathing-beauty contests, jazz, dancing, brief bathing suits, bosses who seduced their employees and women who smoked" – but not, conspicuously, Catholics or Jews.[59] These social evils were causes, for the most part, that Jews of a somewhat conservative bent could readily identify with, or at least not choose to oppose explicitly, which may help to account for the halfhearted opposition the Klan faced from Jewish Texans.

Nevertheless, the Klan's willingness to distinguish Jews from other whites revealed itself to a discomfiting degree in the statements and actions of Klansmen speaking outside official channels. Klan papers in major cities made a constant rhetorical attack against Jewish Texans. They had not always done so, and the speed with which newspapermen who had seemed friendly toward Jews turned against them was especially unsettling. At one time, as a reporter for the *Houston Chronicle*, Billie Mayfield, later editor of the pro-Klan *Colonel Mayfield's Weekly*, had been on good terms with Houston's Jewish community. In one article for the *Chronicle*, in fact, Mayfield described the significance of Yom Kippur and wished "GOOD YONTIF" to "Jews around the world." He singled out several individuals, including Sol M. Oberndorfer, "prince of good fellows"; Izzy Greenberg, "with whom I work"; and Morris Levy, "my pal of years."[60] When he joined the Klan, however, Mayfield turned against his former friends: "I

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[59] Ralph Chase, "A Genial Company of Friends: Presented to the Texas Jewish Historical Society" (13 March 1993), TJHS Box 3A173, Folder 1.
[60] Billie Mayfield, Jr., *Chroniclings of Billie* (Houston: Southwestern Press, 1916).

haven't it in for the Jewish people," he wrote. "There are lots of good Jews in Houston and all over Texas; you find them with tombstones over their heads."[61] Perceiving a Jewish boycott of his advertisers, he began referring to Jewish merchants as "Kikes" and "hooks," condemning them for having "banded together to put a real American out of business who refuses to bow to their assumed superiority."[62]

Mayfield's comments reveal the potential violence that lay beneath Klan rhetoric. In Texas and elsewhere, the Klan enforced its vision of moral and racial order through violence and intimidation, but the Texas Klan distinguished itself by the ferocity and frequency of its attacks. The *Houston Chronicle* reported in the fall of 1921 that "Texas Klansmen have beaten and blackened more people in the last six months than all the other states combined."[63] David Chalmers calculated that the Texas Klan was ultimately responsible for more than 500 "tar-and-feather parties and whipping bees, plus other threats, assaults, and homicides."[64] And despite Grand Cyclops J.D. Van Winkle's assertion at the 1924 Texas State Fair that the Dallas klavern was "doing constructive work . . . instead of indulging in river-bottom floggings, as our enemies would have the public believe," it was common knowledge that his klavern maintained a special "whipping meadow" along the Trinity River bottom where they regularly dispensed their particular form of moral justice.[65]

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[61] *Colonel Mayfield's Weekly* (31 December 1921).
[62] *Colonel Mayfield's Weekly* (25 February 1922).
[63] *Houston Chronicle* (4 October 1921).
[64] Chalmers, 42.
[65] "Hope Cottage Is Dedicated By Klan," *Dallas Morning News* (25 October 1923); Chalmers, 42.

Significantly, the victims of such attacks were usually white Protestants whom the Klan had deemed guilty of some moral transgression. For example, J.S. Paul, a white physician, was taken from his Beaumont home in May of 1921, beaten almost to death, and covered with tar and feathers because he had allegedly performed abortions. The next month in Dallas, the Klan punished a white service station attendant for beating his wife. Other victims included individuals believed to be gamblers, bigamists, adulterers, or drunks. In the summer of 1921, the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* found that of fifty-two acts of coercive violence attributed to the Klan before August 1921, all but seven involved white Protestant victims.[66] As long as the Klan kept their focus on the moral transgressions of their fellow Protestants, then, there was little reason for Jews to oppose them. "[T]he Klan is a Protestant ailing and should be cured by the Protestant," wrote the editor of the *Texas Jewish Herald* in 1924, when Rabbi Henry Cohen pressed him for a more active editorial stance against the Klan. "Preachments in a Jewish Newspaper & Pulpit to Jews would not reach the people affected."[67]

A small number of Jews were among the Klan's early victims, and they were apparently singled out, at least in some degree, for their religious difference

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[66] *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (28 August 1921), quoted in Alexander, *Crusade,* 30. In an unpublished master's thesis, Danny Ahlfield, who agrees with Alexander's conclusion that the Klan in Texas practiced "social regulation" rather than overt racism, provides an important caveat: "One disturbing factor in accepting this thesis is the possibility that it is skewed through source selectivity. That is to say, there is no insurance that the white-controlled press reported every action the Klan took against blacks." Moreover, Ahlfield adds, "Klan actions based primarily on racial prejudice might not have been reflected in that manner in the white press," on which both Alexander and Ahlfield relied exclusively. Danny Ahlfield, *Fraternalism Gone Awry: The Ku Klux Klan In Houston, 1920-1925* (Master's Thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1984): vi. I have surveyed the state's only Jewish newspaper in the early 1920s, the *Texas Jewish Herald*, and have found no reports in that paper of Klan attacks against Jews.

[67] Edgar Goldberg to Henry Cohen (8 July 1924), Henry Cohen Papers, CAH Box 3M241. Capitalization as in original.

or for their tolerant racial attitudes. In March of 1922, for instance, Manual Nussbaum, the twenty-two-year-old son of a wealthy Jewish family in Colorado County near Houston, was tarred and feathered for "despoiling a Gentile girl."[68] The same month, a group of hooded men charged into Philip Rothblum's Dallas house, took him outside and beat him, apparently because an informant had spotted the cafe owner associating with a black man.[69] While clearly brutal, the attacks on Nussbaum and Rothblum were notably less vicious than similar attacks on African Americans; on the rare occasions when Jews received physical "punishment," they received what Stuart Rockoff has called "the lighter, white variety."[70] The relative brutality of such attacks, an acknowledgement of Jews as the Klansmen's fellow whites, was hardly comforting, however, to law-abiding Jews who feared Klan action against them: Klansmen had proven that their definition of a punishable crime was not necessarily the same as the law's.

For most Texas Jews the danger of actual physical violence from the Klan remained remote, and few took it very seriously. More immediately threatening was the possibility that the Klan could organize boycotts against Jewish businesses. One Jewish resident of Corsicana remembered stickers placed in shop windows indicating that they were "Klan sanctioned, and stores without the

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[68] *Colonel Mayfield's Weekly* (18 March 1922).

[69] *Dallas Morning News* (8 March 1922); *Dallas Morning News* (9 March 1922).

[70] Stuart Rockoff, "Identity and Assimilation: the Jewish Community of Houston, 1900-1925" (Master's Report, 1995): 42. In contrast, a party of hooded Dallas Klansmen, in April 1921, kidnapped a black bellhop named Alex Johnson, whom they suspected of "pandering for white men and women," an offense that was as much a moral transgression in the eyes of the Klan as it was a racial one. Future Wizard Hiram Evans personally led the group, which threw Johnson into the back of a car and drove him out of town, where they flogged him severely and branded the letters "KKK" on his forehead with acid. When they were finished, they took the unconscious and bleeding man back to Dallas and dumped him in the street in front of the hotel where he worked. Alexander, *Crusade*, 40; Jackson, 67.

stickers were to be boycotted. Of course, no Jewish stores were marked."[71] The editor of the *Texas (100 Percent) American*, the Klan paper in Dallas, urged a local Jewish tailor not to organize his industry against the Klan, "because if you do the Klan klothiers located all over the kountry might decide that Protestant scissors might better cut the garments they sell."[72] The threat of boycott was real enough that one Jewish store owner in Fort Worth was reported to have paid the Klan initiation fees for his male employees so that other members would not withdraw their business; another added the name of an employee who was a Klan member to his company's letterhead in the hope of discouraging boycotts.[73] Morris Zale, the self-professed "only Jew in town" in Graham, Texas, noticed that customers began to boycott his jewelry business in the months following the establishment of the local klavern. Caution turned to fear when Zale witnessed a downtown parade and initiation ceremony. "When I saw that cross burning," he remembered, "I was scared to death." Zale fled Graham for nearby Wichita Falls, which had more Jews and a less active Klan.[74]

If the order's social organization was strong enough to threaten Jewish businesses, its tightening grasp on legitimate civic power, which had always been open to Jews but to a lesser extent, was more frightening still. The Klan had

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[71] Tommy Stringer, "A Most Unlikely Canaan: A Brief History of the Corsicana Jewish Community," 13, TJHS Box 3A170, Folder 1.
[72] *Texas (100 Percent) American* (8 June 1923), quoted in Linda Elaine Kilgore, "The Ku Klux Klan and the Press in Texas, 1920-1927" (Master's Thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1964): 178. The writer's idiosyncratic spelling, replacing c's with k's, was, according to Kilgore, "an integral part of the mystery which added to the appeal of the organization."
[73] Alexander, *Crusade*, 55; Hollace Ava Weiner, *Jewish Stars in Texas: Rabbis and Their Work* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1999): 97.
[74] Tommy Stringer, "The Zale Corporation: A Texas Success Story" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of North Texas, 1985): 9-12, quoted in Cristol, 97-98.

enough pull in Dallas, Houston, and Austin to get downtown streetlights turned off for their marches in those cities, giving the evening events the requisite spookiness. At such parades, it was typical for Klansmen to march in full regalia in order to protect their anonymity and to create a sense of heightened drama. They often carried signs bearing slogans like "All Native Born" and "White Supremacy," as well as lighted crosses and torches that appeared all the more menacing with the street lights doused. Occasionally, unintended consequences occurred. "Although the turning off of the street lights aided in the effect of the parade," reported the *Austin American* after a large Klan procession in 1921, "many persons not close to the line of march had difficulty in reading the signs because of this lack of light."[75]

Klan influence among public officials was strong throughout Texas. Many residents of Dallas County suspected that both their sheriff and district attorney were active Klansmen – the *Dallas Morning News* referred to the pair as a "bedsheet sheriff" and a "river-bottom advocate" – and known Klan sympathizers occupied similar posts in counties and towns across the state.[76] According to David Chalmers, the mayor and the Board of Police Commissioners of Waco; the county judge and several jurors of DeWitt County (Cuero); and the sheriffs of Jefferson County (Beaumont) and Travis County (Austin) were all Klansmen, as well as "scores upon scores of others."[77] Norman Brown, who has written extensively on Texas politics during the Klan era, explained that

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[75] *Austin American* (3 September 1921).
[76] Quoted in Jackson, 72.
[77] Chalmers, 41.

Klansmen felt they had "immunity from punishment or even investigation" by virtue of the "district and county judges, district and county attorneys, justices of the peace, constables, police commissioners, chiefs of police, policemen, mayors, newspaper editors, and reporters" included among their members. Brown specifically cites Houston, where a Klan leader bragged that the order "ran things its own way," and Austin, where the Klan dominated both the city police force and the Travis County sheriff's office.[78] In addition to the many public officials who supported the Klan, the general public in many towns made no secret of their support for the Invisible Empire. In Lorena, south of Waco, hooded Klansmen, many with weapons concealed beneath their robes, marched in spite of a prohibition by the McLennan County sheriff. When he tried to stop them, a riot ensued in which the sheriff and three others were wounded and a spectator was killed. Five days later, the townspeople adopted a resolution that placed the blame for the fiasco entirely on the sheriff.[79]

Jewish reaction to these developments was muted, in keeping with the relatively minimal direct threat that the Klan posed to Jewish lives and institutions. Whatever their rhetoric, the Klan simply did not justify a sense of emergency to most Jewish Texans. Fort Worth's rabbi, George Fox, treated Klansmen as the friends and associates they were. When reports of Klan violence in his city began to surface, Fox responded meekly: "We had hoped that the Ku Klux Klan would do some things that perhaps would add to the good and the

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[78] Norman D. Brown, *Hood, Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug: Texas Politics, 1921-1928* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1984): 58.
[79] Alexander, *Crusade*, 51-53; Bentley, 19; Chalmers, 41.

glory of the nation . . . without infringing on the rights of others."[80] In his earliest days in the community, Fox was quick to stir up trouble where he felt it necessary, but as Hollace Ava Weiner explains, the man who in 1910 "had been confident of bucking the establishment" by 1922 had become establishment himself and "was not so inclined." Weiner attributes Fox's tepid stance against the Klan to the fact that he had many gentile friends who had joined the order, which was mainstream enough in Fort Worth to field a City League baseball team. When word spread of a potential boycott of Jewish businesses, Fox went to his contacts inside the Klan and received their "absolute word" that no boycott would take place.[81] When the rabbi accepted an offer of a Chicago post in 1923, the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce held a banquet in his honor "at which," Fox remembered, "the Texas head of the Ku Klux Klan presided, and a check was given me as a going-away present, with which I was to buy a new car when we got to Chicago."[82]

When Fox did speak out against the Klan, he did so amicably: "Just as my non-Jewish friends who say something against my co-religionists always assure me that their 'best friends are Jews,'" he wrote in a privately published circular, "so say I now to those who might feel that my words are directed against them, that among these false prophets are also some of 'my best friends.'"[83] Fox proceeded to dissect the Klan's limited definition of "100% Americanism,"

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[80] *Jewish Monitor* (3 February 1922), quoted in Weiner, *Jewish Stars*, 96.
[81] Weiner, *Jewish Stars*, 97.
[82] G. George Fox, "The End of an Era," in Stanley F. Chyet, ed., *Lives And Voices: A Collection Of American Jewish Memoirs* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1972): 289.
[83] George Fox, "Who Is 100 Per Cent American?" (Fort Worth: Temple Beth-El): 1.

emphasizing that Jews, Catholics, and the foreign-born were true patriots, and that the Klan itself posed a graver threat to American values by its "injection of religious fanaticism into the body politic of our country."[84] Rather than singling out groups for attack, he argued, the Klan should recognize that "[o]ur country has attained greatness because in it are mixed the best elements of many peoples, and multitudes of faiths."[85] In the *Jewish Monitor*, which he edited, Fox was even less direct, reassuring his Jewish readership that the Klan threatened their place in American society only minimally: "The alleged prejudice against Jews in these organizations is exaggerated," he wrote, and "we can only make matters worse by consistently dwelling upon the unfortunate intrusion into the calmness of American life of racial and religious prejudice."[86] For Fox, then, the Klan's anti-Semitism was of less importance than the generalized divisions they fomented among all Americans.

In Galveston, Henry Cohen, together with his close friend Father James Kirwin, led a quiet and personal, though more direct resistance in a city where the Klan had little public support. As the authors of Rabbi Cohen's biography explain, "Galveston had a cultured, cosmopolitan population" with a large Catholic community. Rabbi Cohen "was one of the best-liked men in town," and "[t]he newspapers were anti-Klan, the afternoon paper now being published by the Rabbi's son." African Americans in Galveston were generally well-treated and voted regularly in city elections.[87] Galveston did manage to scrape together a

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[84] Fox, "Who Is 100 Per Cent American?," 4.
[85] Fox, "Who Is 100 Per Cent American?," 6.
[86] *Jewish Monitor* (12 May 1922), quoted in Weiner, *Jewish Stars*, 97.
[87] Nathan and Cohen, 252-53.

Klan chapter, though, and Cohen spoke against it whenever he could. At one public gathering he harshly denounced a preacher in attendance who had explained from his pulpit why the Jewish people deserved the Klan's condemnation.[88] With Kirwin, the rabbi secured a promise from city officials to deny parade permits to Klansmen, and Cohen lobbied the manager of a local movie theater to cancel its screening of *Birth of a Nation*, which celebrated the Reconstruction-era Klan.[89]

In Dallas, where Klan influence was stronger and more malevolent, Rabbi David Lefkowitz of Temple Emanu-El was a more vocal and forthright opponent, dedicating a number of sermons, public speeches and guest editorials to speaking out against the Klan, though his general approach closely resembled Fox's. Lefkowitz arrived in Dallas in 1920, the year before the Texas Klan began its rise to prominence, and he soon became a signer of the first call for a public meeting to rally opposition to the nascent organization. He was also among the first members of the Dallas County Citizens League, which opposed the order on the political front. Lefkowitz wrote often to provide encouragement to George B. Dealey, the publisher of the *Dallas Morning News* and the *Dallas Journal*, both of which lost circulation over their vocal anti-Klan position.[90] In return, Dealey reprinted a sermon Lefkowitz delivered on the Friday following Klan Day at the State Fair. "[Evans] is a thousand times wrong," Lefkowitz said in reaction to the Imperial Wizard's claim that Jews were "an absolutely unblendable element."

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[88] Nathan and Cohen, 254-58.
[89] Weiner, *Jewish Stars*, 74.
[90] Cristol, 99.

"[He] has wrongly flouted my people, and I will not be silent." The rabbi's defense hinged on the principle that Jews, many of whom had fought and died defending democracy in World War I, were as loyal, patriotic, and American as anyone else.[91] In response to a reader's praise of the article, Lefkowitz remarked that he hoped that his "appeals to patriotism, common sense, and love of God" would "break the hold of the Klan upon a great many well-meaning people who were lured into it."[92]

Despite his clear revulsion for the Klan, these comments reveal Lefkowitz's willingness to attack the Klan on its own terms, to accept their claim to be a patriotic and benevolent organization. His defense of "his people" focused on their patriotism and Americanism, not on their Jewishness or on their right to be respected regardless of race or religion. Like Fox, Lefkowitz emphasized the values that Jews shared with other Americans. This approach recurred in an effort that Lefkowitz counted as one of his greatest successes: the rabbi, a thirty-third-degree Mason, helped to purge local chapters of the Masonic Order of Klan influence. The Klan, whose organizational structure was modeled after fraternal societies like the Masons, recruited heavily in the lodge. Lefkowitz observed that the Klan "got a good foot-hold and respectability through the fact that it had bored into the Masonic Lodge," and he tried to discourage more Masons from adding Klan membership to their lists of civic activities. At the same time, he worked to undermine the Klan's influence within the Masonic Order itself. After a non-Klan Mason narrowly defeated a Klansman for district officer of the Dallas

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[91] *Dallas Morning News* (25 October 1923), quoted in Cristol, 99-100.
[92] Quoted in Cristol, 100.

Lodge, Lefkowitz spoke to the crowd gathered at the electoral meeting and appealed to them "in the well known thesis of good-will and fundamental religious attitudes." He challenged his gentile brothers in the Lodge, as Christians, to rethink their support for the Invisible Empire: "Do you believe in God and brotherhood and care of the widow and orphan?" he asked them. "How do you square that with your actions relative to discrimination as to race and creed?" He pointed out that Jewish and non-Jewish Masons had all proven their patriotism, many on European battlefields, and deserved to be treated as equals. The address cleared the air, Lefkowitz later remembered, and was a "death blow" to Klan activity within the Masonic order. After this, he said, Masons had little trouble from the group.[93]

In these and other cases, Texas rabbis fought the Klan from within the shelter of white communal institutions and from a position entirely on the inside of their cities' power establishments. Cohen acted as one of the most respected men in Galveston, Lefkowitz as a high-ranking Mason among Masons, and Fox, astonishingly, from virtually within the Klan itself. They were all insiders, thoroughly acculturated to the American way of life and accepted in the halls of

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[93] Quoted in Ritz, 54 and Cristol, 100. The Klan also exercised influence in the Masonic order in Houston, where they organized to blackball all Jewish applicants for membership. Judge Henry Dannenbaum, one of the city's most prominent Jewish leaders and activists, called on his fellow Masons to publicly reject the Klan's agenda, and when he received no response he resigned from the lodge. Jewish Masons who remained active responded to the Klansmen's action by blackballing *every* applicant regardless of religion, assuring that "if Jews of worth were to be denied membership simply because they were Jews, then there would be no new Masons at all." The Klansmen in the order relented and agreed to admit a small number of Jews. Within a few years the matter had passed. Ben Leff to Robert I. Kahn (20 May 1980) and Robert I. Kahn to Jacob R. Marcus (19 May 1980), AJA Small Collection 6486; Author's interview with Rabbi Robert I. Kahn (7 October 1995). Hollace Ava Weiner describes a similar *contretemps* between Rabbi Maurice Faber of Tyler and that city's Masonic chapter. Weiner, *Jewish Stars*, 45.

civic power. As such, they built their public resistance to the Klan on the premise that the Invisible Empire was only a danger to Jews insofar as it challenged their claim to secular American values that Jews cherished as much as everyone else. Jews were patriots, these rabbis insisted, American heroes who had died on the fields of France, who had given their lives and fortune for the sake of their country. In making their quiet stand against the Klan, these rabbis forged solidarity with like-minded gentiles much more actively than they sought common cause with one another, avoiding even the appearance of a Jewish community organized for sectarian purposes. Thus they answered the Imperial Wizard's charge that Jews were "unblendable" by insisting that they were part of a white American consensus. Klansmen, they felt, not Jews, threatened that consensus by drawing lines between people where none actually existed. "That the Ku Klux Klan does not admit Jews bothers me little," wrote Rabbi Fox. The real problem was "the constant injection into public life of the differences which are bound to exist, in a nation made up of so many different peoples as is ours."[94]

When the Klan began exercising influence in state and national affairs, however, its members entered an arena beyond the reach of civic insiders. Particularly in the field of electoral politics, the Klan presented a dire threat to the sense of security and belonging that Texas Jews had cultivated. As acculturated white Texans, and like white Southerners everywhere at that time, Texas Jews were Democrats and would gladly support qualified Democratic candidates for state and federal offices. Rabbi Fox, among others, insisted that the voters' duty

[94] Fox, "Who Is 100 Per Cent American?," 6.

was to elect candidates "on their merit, on their achievements as Americans, on their ability to carry out the oath of office" regardless of sectarian matters of race or religion.[95] Had there been no Ku Klux Klan, Jewish voters in Texas and elsewhere would have gone on happily voting for qualified Democratic candidates and congratulating themselves on their successful Americanization and equal participation in the democratic process. But there was a Klan, and by the 1922 elections it had launched a national effort to help sympathetic candidates reach major offices. That year, the order helped elect friendly governors in Georgia, Alabama, California and Oregon. As many as seventy-five members of the U.S. House of Representatives had received crucial support from voters sympathetic to the Klan, and a handful of sitting U.S. senators, looking toward future elections, began cozying up to the organization. In Arkansas, the Klan was so powerful that it held its own unofficial primary in advance of the regular Democratic one to decide which of its members to support for the nomination.[96]

But few other realms in the growing Klan empire enjoyed political success as great as that of Texas.[97] In many districts popular anti-Klan incumbents, among them future Vice-President John Nance Garner and future House Speaker Sam Rayburn, found themselves dangerously close to expulsion. In Dallas, the Klan helped make Edith Wilmans the first woman to serve in the Texas Legislature. And, remarkably in a state dominated by Democrats, the Klan was

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[95] Ibid.

[96] Chalmers, 3.

[97] Indiana's Klan enjoyed particularly broad political success, as did the state organization in Colorado. See, for example, Max Bentley, "The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana," *McClure's Magazine* 57 (May 1924): 23-33 and Robert Alan Goldberg, *Hooded Empire: The Ku Klux Klan in Colorado* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981).

able to wield its power in both parties: in San Antonio, they stood behind a Republican candidate who, with Klan help, defeated his Jewish Democratic opponent by about 3,000 votes.[98] Most spectacularly, Earle Mayfield (who bore no relation to Billie Mayfield of *Colonel Mayfield's Weekly*), a nominee hand-picked by Hiram Evans and Texas Klan leaders, became the first candidate with known Klan support to win a seat in the U.S. Senate.[99]

Mayfield's Klan-backed candidacy was the first of many to drive a wedge through Texas Jewish identity. On his "merits," "achievements" and "ability," the criteria Rabbi Fox advocated, Mayfield was perfectly acceptable, and in a normal year most Jewish voters would probably have voted for him without difficulty. Mayfield was never a dues-paying member of the Klan, nor did he ever mention it publicly during the campaign. However, because of the organization that stood behind him and because of the Klan's stated opposition to immigration and to pluralistic self-identification, Jewish voters had to think twice before supporting Mayfield. Once having stopped to think, they were on a slippery slope. When Texas Jews considered the views of Mayfield's backers, even when the candidate himself was silent, they drew a new boundary between themselves and Protestant voters. Protestants, whatever their personal feelings about the Ku Klux Klan, could vote in reasonable conscience for a candidate whom a prominent Klansman described admiringly as "the native-born white Protestant Gentile."[100] Jews who

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[98] Brown, 118-19.
[99] Kenneth T. Jackson writes that Mayfield was "endorsed by the realm hierarchy and given a vote of confidence by the potent Dallas klavern, which in a special Klan runoff election lined up 1400 [votes] for Mayfield" as opposed to only 700 for his nearest competitor. Jackson, 72.
[100] Quoted in Chalmers, 43.

stopped to consider their choice suddenly became *Jewish* voters, not in fact fully blended, but voting out of a distinctive set of concerns. Here, then, is the real threat that the Klan posed to Jews in Texas: it forced them to choose whether to identify themselves as whites able to overlook sectarian matters or as Jews with separate, segregated concerns. By reminding them that they were not as fully integrated as they thought, the Klan inadvertently forced Texas Jews to renegotiate an internal frontier they thought they had conquered.

In the Democratic primary, Earle Mayfield defeated a six-man field that included three professed Klansmen and James Ferguson, the former governor who had been removed from office in 1917.[101] "Farmer Jim" was a powerful spokesman for white laborers and farmers who rewarded him with tenacious support; they even backed him in a quixotic 1920 presidential race on his own American Party ticket. His oratory, "a style of speaking that mixed bad grammar, folksy stories, sarcasm, and slander in about equal proportions," set a new standard for rousing political speech in a state known before and after for its flamboyant public speakers.[102] Ferguson was the son of a circuit-riding Methodist preacher; took money from brewers and saloon keepers and so opposed Prohibition (which the Klan supported); ridiculed the wealthy and the urban elite;

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[101] Hollace Weiner has described in detail the role that Rabbi Maurice Faber of Tyler played in the impeachment of Governor Ferguson. Faber, whom Ferguson had appointed to the University of Texas Board of Regents, refused to follow administrative orders emanating from Ferguson's office and refused to resign when the governor demanded that he do so. As details emerged of the financial scandal Ferguson was attempting to use Faber to cover up, other regents, including Alex Sanger, resigned in protest. Ferguson was later indicted, based in part on evidence contained in his correspondence with Faber, and removed from office. While Weiner does not suggest that these events had anything to do with the anti-Semitic positions Ferguson took later, it is not unreasonable to imagine a connection. Weiner, *Jewish Stars*, 45ff.

[102] Brown, 96.

and, in the judgment of an Austin newspaper editor, "purposely played ignorant to win the rural vote."[103] Beloved by the rural whites whose causes he championed, Ferguson's ruthless ambition, questionable ethics, and slick political tactics were a source of embarrassment for just about everyone else in the state, including its well-educated and largely urban Jewish population. By comparison Mayfield seemed an acceptable if imperfect choice to most Democratic primary voters. Republicans nominated George Peddy, whose anti-Klan candidacy gave the morally conscious Jewish voter some alternative, but Peddy was a bland and uninspiring candidate who, in an essentially one-party state, had no real chance of winning. Loyalty to the Democratic Party was deep, with roots all the way back to Reconstruction, and there were many Texas voters, Jews and gentiles, who would never consider voting for a Republican under any circumstances.

As the campaign progressed, Jews elsewhere compounded the headaches of Texas Jewish voters by pressuring them to act and vote on behalf of Jews everywhere in the face of what they saw as a grave national political crisis. Louis Marshall, the nation's most prominent Jewish leader, wrote to Henry Cohen, urging him to take stronger action against Mayfield and his supporters. Marshall presumed (wrongly, it so happens) that Mayfield was "conducting his fight on an anti-Catholic, anti-Jewish platform." If this were true, he continued, "it is not conceivable that [Texas Jews] are indifferent. . . . Should Mayfield win, the K.K.K. would not refrain from carrying out its anti-Semitic policies." Marshall recognized that it would be inappropriate for him or for other non-Texans to

[103] Edmund Travis, quoted in Brown, 96.

intervene directly, so Jews in Texas had an even greater obligation "to stand up for their manhood and to fight for the protection of their rights."[104] Not only the Klan, but fellow Jews as well were forcing an unwelcome divergence between Jewish and mainstream white concerns.

Cohen responded brusquely to the charge: "We are fighting the K.K.K. in our own way," referring presumably to his efforts with Father Kirwin to exert quiet personal pressure on city officials. Cohen assured Marshall that Texas Jews would vote overwhelmingly for Peddy of their own accord, and so "no organized campaign will be necessary." Cohen went on to declare that he did not consider Mayfield an anti-Semite. "He is not the avowed candidate of the Klan," Cohen explained, "nor did he mention the Klan in his campaign." In closing, Cohen again assured Marshall that Texas Jews were "alive to the possibilities and we are taking quiet precautions in the matter."[105] Cohen's position was grounded in the hard reality of the situation. With the Klan in ascendancy, Jewish voters felt that they had little option but to follow the rabbi's lead in downplaying their desperation: Mayfield would be their senator as well as the Klan's, and stubborn Democratic party loyalty would compel many Jewish voters to support him. Many felt, like Cohen, that there was nothing anyone could do to alter the outcome.

The 1922 senatorial race was the first of many statewide elections over the next decade in which Texas Jews would face the unsavory task of choosing the lesser from a field of evils. Like many other Texas Democrats, they resented and

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[104] Louis Marshall to Henry Cohen (20 September 1922), Henry Cohen Papers, CAH Box 3M240.
[105] Henry Cohen to Louis Marshall (5 October 1922), Henry Cohen Papers, CAH Box 3M240.

feared the intrusion of the Klan element and hoped for a better alternative than voting Republican. Unfortunately, the only Democratic politician in the state with the electoral strength to build opposition to the Klan into a viable campaign strategy was also the most widely despised – Jim Ferguson. However distasteful Jewish voters may have found Ferguson's personal style and dubious past, some viewed him as an acceptable alternative to Mayfield in the 1922 Democratic primary. Ferguson distinguished himself in that campaign as the only candidate to make an issue of Mayfield's Klan ties, condemning the front runner as the "crown prince of the Klan" and the pawn of a "hydra-headed monster."[106] Once, in a small East Texas town, Ferguson scolded a group of Klan supporters in what one witness called "one of the most forthright statements I ever heard." Ferguson warned that "some of you young men who have been listening to the wrong people . . . will be talked into going with the crowd." They would eventually take actions, he said, "whipping a man or something worse," that would lead to "the penitentiary in Huntsville. Or it could be the electric chair." All this unnecessary pain, he concluded, would come "because you listened to some contemptible bigot."[107] This direct approach earned Ferguson some allies among Jews and other anti-Klan Texans, and with his eye on future campaigns he continued his attacks on the Klan after losing the 1922 race. From his office in Temple, an agricultural community midway between Waco and Austin, he published a weekly, the *Ferguson Forum*, in which he constructed an image of himself as the greatest anti-Klansman in Texas. In early 1923, he moved the *Forum*'s

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[106] *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (13 August 1922).
[107] Stanley Walker, *Texas* (New York: Viking, 1962): 30.

headquarters to Dallas, the Klan's greatest Texas stronghold, a gambit he hoped would put him in a better position to make a run for governor in 1924. In addition to its Klan element, Dallas was a retailing mecca with a wealth of potential advertisers that Temple, with its farming base, could never match. Looking toward the coming election, Ferguson hoped to be able to count on support from Dallas's wealthy Jewish community in the epic battle he planned to stage over the Klan's influence in Texas politics.

Despite the inroads he had made with Jewish Texans, though, Ferguson managed within a matter of weeks of his arrival in Dallas to destroy whatever good will he had built. By his own account, he approached many of Dallas's leading Jewish merchants to ask them to advertise in the *Forum*, reminding them of his attempt the previous year to defeat a Klan-sponsored candidate. The response was tepid. One Jewish firm, Ferguson reported, bought $25.00 worth of ads, in exchange for which Ferguson bought $37.50 worth of floor covering – only to have the company decline to buy more advertising. He accused another Jewish-owned company of spending only $8.00 in the *Forum* on the same day they bought $400.00 worth of ads in the *Texas (100 Percent) American*, the city's Klan organ.[108] A survey of the *Texas (100 Percent) American* during the months Ferguson was in Dallas reveals no advertisements by Jewish firms, suggesting that Ferguson was mistaken, that he misrepresented the incident, or that the editor of the *American* took $400.00 from a Jewish merchant and then neglected to run the advertisement purchased.

[108] Jim Ferguson, "The Cloven Foot of the Dallas Jew," *Ferguson Forum* (15 March 1923).

Ferguson responded to these perceived slights with a scathing editorial, "The Cloven Foot of the Dallas Jew," in which he described himself as "puzzled as well as disappointed" at the Jewish response to his requests for support, especially since he "had been criticized so bitterly for defending the legal right of the Jews," presumably a reference to his opposition to the Klan. Purchasing a few ads, he said, would have been a simple and painless way for Jewish merchants "to show some appreciation of the stand I had taken." When Ferguson prodded "one of the big Jew merchants" for an explanation, the merchant revealed that "the reason he could not give me any business was because of the political feature of The Forum and that because I had been so emphatic in my statements against the Ku Klux." At that point, Ferguson said, "I knew I was getting at the facts." In the remainder of the column, Ferguson outlined his belief that Jewish businessmen and the Klan had "hatched in Dallas an unholy alliance . . . whereby the Ku Klux are to get the big offices and the Big Jews are to get the big business." He warned his readers that if they bought anything from a "Jew store" they were "buying from the friend of the Ku Klux," a merchant who had "[surrendered] his religion to help his business." Ferguson vowed to "bust up this Ku-Jew-Klux Kombination if it is the last thing I ever do."[109] While the Klan condemned Jews for failing to assimilate sufficiently enough, Ferguson condemned them for selling out their religion.

Harry Merfeld, writing on behalf of the Jewish business community, responded to Ferguson's charges in the *Jewish Monitor*, Rabbi George Fox's Fort

[109] Ibid. Italics missing in the original.

Worth weekly. Merfeld did not deny that Jewish merchants had given the former governor the cold shoulder, but he argued that Ferguson had misinterpreted "the motive that prompted the action of the Jewish merchants of Dallas." Merfeld took strong objection to Ferguson's attack on the character of Dallas Jews. "Asinine opinions to the contrary," he wrote, Dallas Jews were "honest, self-respecting citizens, 100 per cent Americans, if you please." The best way for them to prove their detractors wrong, he continued, was to "[maintain] a dignified and gentlemanly demeanor, even in the face of unwarranted and unjustifiable vilification and abuse," and to "[decline] to support or foster in any way yellow journalism in whatsoever guise it may stalk." Finally, in a direct attack on Ferguson himself, Merfeld declared that Dallas Jews would refuse "in no uncertain terms to have fellowship with or to be identified in any way, however remote, with any movement sponsored by you and your kind."[110]

Ferguson was quick to parse Merfeld's words: "When he says that the Dallas Jews will not be identified with any movement sponsored by me," he wrote in a front-page response in the *Forum*, "he means that hereafter the Jews will not in any way approve . . . the opposition of the Forum to the Ku Klux." The editor also singled out Merfeld's use of a familiar phrase, remarking that "you now say that you are 100 per cent American," but "this 100 per cent talk, of course, is what the Ku Klux have put in your mouth to say."[111] Ferguson's argument that Jews'

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[110] Quoted in "The Big Jew Gets Mad," *Ferguson Forum* (5 April 1923). Merfeld's comments were published in the *Jewish Monitor* on March 23, 1923, and Ferguson excerpted them in his rebuttal. Since I was unable to locate an extant copy of this issue of the *Monitor*, I have relied on Ferguson's excerpts, which appear typographically accurate. Ferguson, of course, may have reprinted them out of context.

[111] Ferguson, "The Big Jew Gets Mad."

resistance to him was tantamount to donning hoods of their own made him permanently unacceptable as a candidate to many Texas Jews. In the political climate of the time, however, few better alternatives were available.

The bitterness that Jewish voters continued to feel for Ferguson came to a head in the extraordinarily fierce gubernatorial campaign of 1924, the year after the publication of "The Cloven Foot." Ferguson entered the race in January, insisting that his prior impeachment did not bar him from running again for statewide office. The Texas Supreme Court disagreed and declared him ineligible.[112] In response, Ferguson offered his wife as a candidate to run in his place: "If the State has a Governor Ferguson," he declared, "we need not fall out about who signs on the dotted line."[113] Miriam A. Ferguson – whose initials soon earned her the nickname "Ma" – accepted her husband's platform as her own and let "Pa" do most of the talking. In addition to promises to reduce state appropriations, strengthen the prison system, and limit the enforcement of Prohibition laws, the Fergusons offered several policy initiatives directed at the Klan. Among these, a strict antimask law (which eventually passed in 1925) would imprison anyone appearing in public with his face covered or in disguise of any kind; masked participants, even in private meetings, could receive jail terms if discovered. The Fergusons also proposed a requirement that secret and fraternal societies file the names of their members in their county clerks' offices for public scrutiny.

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[112] Ferguson's court claim was pure expedience: he had run for president in 1920 and senator in 1922 with the understanding that his impeachment had, in fact, made him ineligible for state office.

[113] Quoted in Brown, 216.

The Fergusons' chief opponent in the Democratic primary was Klansman Felix Robertson, a Dallas criminal district court judge and a formal member of the Dallas klavern who had sat on the podium at the Hope Cottage dedication ceremony during the 1923 State Fair; in its report of that event, the *Dallas Morning News* described Robertson as one of the "klan dignitaries" in attendance.[114] Robertson never bragged about his participation in the order, but he also never denied his sympathy. In a stance characteristic of the Klan's support for moral law and order, Robertson declared himself a prohibitionist and promised the "prompt, vigorous and impartial enforcement" of anti-liquor laws.[115] In addition, Robertson billed himself as a "praying judge" who advocated a renewed public focus on Christianity: "above all those ghastly ruins [of fallen civilizations] there stands but one thing," he said in a typical stump speech, "the rugged cross of Christianity, the cross on which our master was sacrificed."[116] Making additional pledges to enforce the blue laws restricting the sale of merchandise on Sundays, to abolish immigration, and to suppress foreign-language newspapers, Robertson was a candidate the Klan could wholeheartedly endorse – and one straight from the nightmares of Jewish voters.

At least with Earle Mayfield in 1922, Jews had been able to comfort themselves with the belief that the candidate had never officially been a Klansman and was something more than a mouthpiece for the order. Robertson, in contrast, made no secret of his allegiance to the Invisible Empire, and it was well known

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[114] "Hope Cottage Is Dedicated By Klan," *Dallas Morning News* (25 October 1923).
[115] Quoted in Brown, 213-14.
[116] Quoted in Brown, 216.

that the state's highest Klan officials had selected him. But the equally unthinkable alternative for Texas Jews was to rally behind the author of "The Cloven Foot of the Dallas Jew." The choice also confounded non-Jewish voters, but they were more easily reconciled, especially as Ma's candidacy put some apparent distance between Pa and the governor's chair. "They say that Jim will run the state," said one former Ferguson opponent. "All right, I'd rather have it run by James and Miriam Ferguson than by Evans, Marvin, Butcher, Robertson and gang."[117] The *Dallas Morning News*, which had opposed Pa Ferguson as governor and remained among his harshest critics, also viewed the Klan as a greater evil than another Ferguson administration. Ma's election, the *News* determined, "will sound the death knell of the klan as a political power in this State," and so they supported it.[118] Gentile voters had clear reservations about the Ferguson ticket, but only Jews had faced the particular bigotry of which Farmer Jim was capable.

Recognizing an opportunity amid the confusion, Klansman Robertson perversely made a play for Jewish votes. Many of his supporters distributed copies of "The Cloven Foot of the Dallas Jew," adding the caption "Ferguson Vents Spleen on Jewish People."[119] Not all of Robertson's supporters got behind

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[117] Quoted in Brown, 229. In addition to Imperial Wizard Hiram Evans and candidate Felix Robertson, this commentator refers to Zeke Marvin and George Butcher, two officials in the Klan's state organization.

[118] *Dallas Morning News* (17 August 1924).

[119] *Dallas Morning News* (15 August 1924) and *Texas (100 Percent) American* (8 August 1924). Two other primary candidates, Lynch Davidson of Houston and T. Whitfield Davidson of Marshall, opposed the Klan and reached out for Jewish votes by advertising in the state's Jewish newspapers. Partly because of confusion over their shared surname, they split the vote that might have put one of them into a run-off with Robertson, the clear front-runner. Instead, both were pushed out in the first voting round, leaving Robertson to contend with Miriam Ferguson in the run-off and leaving Jews (and other voters of conscience) with little recourse.

the effort, however. In Houston, Dr. D.L. Griffith, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church, called a meeting of local clergymen to enlist their backing for Robertson. When reporters grew suspicious that Griffith himself was affiliated with the Klan, they asked the pastor why he had only invited Protestant clergy to the meeting. Griffith replied that members of other denominations simply preferred not to attend, and besides he had not invited any.[120] Even Robertson himself, in his final speech of the primary season, alienated many of the same Jewish voters he was trying to court by reiterating his call for a state government of "common sense, common honesty and Christianity."[121] But with Ferguson in the race, even if indirectly, the choice for most Jewish voters was complex: many probably found it easier to support Robertson, a Klan-backed candidate who *might* have been an anti-Semite, over Ferguson, an anti-Klan shadow candidate who clearly *was* an anti-Semite.

A number of statements in the *Texas Jewish Herald* reveal the degree to which the Klan's influence in politics had upset and confused the Jewish electorate. Rabbi David Goldberg of Wichita Falls (no relation to editor Edgar Goldberg) wrote in the *Herald* of the "vagueness and confusion" infecting politics even at the national level. "This is due to the note of insincerity and evasiveness injected by the Ku Klux Klan," he explained. "No one knows who is who and what one stands for."[122] In a related editorial, the rabbi responded incredulously to a question from a reader: "Should a Jew oppose the Klan?" The question itself,

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[120] Ahlfield, 87.
[121] *Dallas Morning News* (23 August 1924), quoted in Brown, 238.
[122] David Goldberg, "Up in the Air," *Texas Jewish Herald* (26 June 1924).

he said, is "evidence of the confusion which the advent of the hooded organization has brought into the minds of otherwise clear thinking people." Of course Jews should oppose the Klan, he answered, "and that because the Klan [has] placed the Jew in opposition to itself."[123]

For most Texas voters, the Ferguson ticket offered the best hope of ridding the state of an organization with which they were quickly losing patience. When the primary votes were counted, Mrs. Ferguson had defeated Robertson by nearly 100,000 votes statewide in the largest tally ever polled in a Texas election up to that time. Even in urban counties where Klan support was strongest, Ma polled surprisingly well. The loss signaled the beginning of the end for the Texas Klan: "After Robertson was beaten," remembered a former member, "the prominent men left the Klan. The Klan's standing went with them."[124] But the Klan was not quite finished, and the November general election still remained ahead.

To oppose Mrs. Ferguson, the Republicans nominated George Butte, a mild-mannered law professor who, though vocal in his opposition to the Klan, was far less so than Farmer Jim. Jewish voters were again faced with a stark and complicated choice, and their ambivalence appears clearly in the pages of the *Texas Jewish Herald*. In October, just weeks before the general election, Butte supporters purchased a half-page of the *Herald* in order to reprint Ferguson's "Cloven Foot" editorial in full. Beneath it, the advertisement announced that Butte was "an eminently qualified, broad-minded man interested in the welfare of

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[123] David Goldberg, "Should a Jew Oppose the Klan?" *Texas Jewish Herald* (21 August 1924).
[124] Alexander, *Southwest*, 199.

every citizen of Texas, without regard to race or creed."[125] That position might have been a disappointment to Texas Klansmen, who rallied half-heartedly behind the Republican in a last-ditch hope to defeat the Ferguson ticket. The Klan's limited but visible involvement in the Butte campaign was more than many Jews could stand, and the Fergusons pushed to bring Jewish voters back into their camp. One week after the Butte advertisement appeared in the *Herald*, Harris County Democrats sponsored a larger announcement "[c]ordially inviting our Jewish friends to vote and see that all of their friends vote for Mrs. Miriam Ferguson," who was "the Democratic Nominee and Anti-Klan."[126] The involvement of the hooded order in Texas politics had not only deepened the line that divided Jews from other whites, but it had sown division even among Jewish voters: those who supported Butte had betrayed party allegiance and joined with the Klan, but those who stayed with the Democrats and Ferguson had accepted a proven anti-Semite.

In the end, to no one's surprise, Ma Ferguson was elected easily. Butte's loss dealt a swift death-blow to the Texas Klan, and interest in the group vanished. Only nine months earlier, the Houston chapter had sponsored a huge initiation ceremony on Main Street featuring a fly-over by an airplane with a huge fiery cross on its underbelly; in December, however, the Fort Worth chapter had trouble building even moderate excitement for a parade. As the *Houston Press* reported, "the public is about fed up with the klan."[127] Both *Colonel Mayfield's*

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[125] *Texas Jewish Herald* (23 October 1924).
[126] *Texas Jewish Herald* (30 October 1924).
[127] *Houston Press* (5 December 1924), quoted in Ahlfield, 110.

Weekly and the *Texas (100 Percent) American* folded, along with klaverns across the state. As Charles Alexander has written, "By the end of 1924 Texas, once the most cherished prize of the men who ran the Klan, was no longer the number one state in Klandom."[128] The hooded order lingered at the local level in many cities for the next year or so but was finished as a legitimate avenue for political action. The order's fate was sealed in 1926 when Attorney General Dan Moody, who had risen to fame by fighting the Klan in the courts, defeated Ma Ferguson and served two terms as governor. Moody finally gave voters an opportunity to support a reputable and likable Democrat who was not tainted by a corrupt past or by the whiff of personal ambition and vindictiveness. As quickly as it had started, the era of the Texas Klan ended.

Though brief in duration, the period of Klan power had a lasting impact on at least one group. Throughout their history, Texas Jews had manifested an almost unquestioned commitment to acculturation. They had made every effort to prove themselves worthy fellow-citizens and to downplay the ethnic and religious differences that distinguished them from the gentiles whose respect, friendship, and business they desired. In their own eyes, they were as native to the Lone Star State as anyone else, and they had continually emphasized their patriotism, military service and civic leadership in order to get gentiles to see them as they saw themselves. The Klan's success, however, at finding a willing audience among gentiles and at infiltrating state and local governments demonstrated that such acceptance was not forthcoming and in fact had never really existed. The

[128] Alexander, *Southwest*, 199.

Klan's popularity threw into high relief the fundamental differences between Jews and other Texans: Jews were Anglos, perhaps, but they could never be Anglo-Saxons, and as long as they held to their Jewishness even a little, they would never be American enough for the Klan or for the public that supported it. The Klan's brief foray into Texas politics had drawn a bright and permanent line between Jews and other Texans that ended their long effort to acculturate fully. Their future, instead, would be to develop and strengthen their distinctive identity as Jews and to experience with the rest of world Jewry the great crises of the twentieth century.

Chapter 6. "Some Now Know a Bagel When They See One": The Jewish Center Comes to Texas

"The miraculous story of a people's struggle against tyranny, a story that was thousands of years in the writing, is told in one inspired phrase – from Egypt to Texas." So the authors of the *Golden Book of Congregation Adath Yeshurun*, in celebration of their Houston synagogue's 50th anniversary in 1941, imagined a straight line from the ancient history of the Jewish people to their eventual home in Texas. Symbolically equating Tsarist Russia, from which many of them had fled, with biblical Egypt, they likened their experience to the Exodus, recalling their own "providential escape" which revealed "the same truth that the Israelites of old saw in the wonders of the exodus." Like the escape from Egypt, theirs was a prophetic journey of both material and spiritual liberation, "[f]rom oppression to freedom . . . from broken body and spirit to the joyous worship of God," a flight that had once again assured the survival of Jewish life. For these writers, the journey ended in Texas, whose "wide and open spaces . . . symbolized the unrestrained welcome that America extended to those who were seeking a new home." They found Texas congenial and felt themselves part of its history. They noted proudly that "a Jewish name is . . . immortalized among the martyrs of the Alamo and several others are mentioned in the course of the struggle for freedom from Mexican rule." And when Texas independence was achieved, they remarked, "the adventuresome spirit of the Jew thrilled with other Texans at the establishment of the Lone Star Republic."[1]

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[1] *The Golden Book Of Congregation Adath Yeshurun, 1891-1941* (Houston, 1942): 15-16.

But few members of Congregation Adath Yeshurun had Texas ancestors. Theirs was an Orthodox synagogue, and most of them were either immigrants from Eastern Europe or the children of immigrants. Their ancestors had defied religious reform, and they were themselves committed to resisting the urge to accommodate their religion to the requirements of secular America. In this they were different from most of the acculturated German Jews who had preceded them to Texas, and they felt themselves part of a "new phase of the Jewish settlement of Texas" that had begun with "the advent of the Russo-Polish migrations." Their path was different from earlier Texas Jews, moreover, not only in that it originated in Eastern rather than Central Europe, but also because it had taken them through New York City: "From New York," the *Golden Book* explained, Jews "began to trickle into the hinterland and Texas received its share."[2] Thus the Jewish population of Texas grew rapidly in the 1910s and 1920s as Jews from New York and other Northern cities made their way south, even while the First World War (after 1914) and restrictive U.S. immigration laws (in 1921 and 1924) effectively stabilized New York's Jewish population by slowing and then halting the influx of new immigrants. The wave of Eastern European immigration that transformed Jewish communities in America's great cities between 1880 and 1920 was a generation late reaching Texas, and when it arrived it already bore the imprint of another America.

Eastern European Jews had been in Texas since the early years of Jewish settlement there, but they had had relatively little impact on Texas communities.

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[2] *Golden Book*, 16.

They did not begin to arrive in significant numbers until the Galveston Movement of 1908 to 1914, which brought in as many as half of the approximately 4,000 Jews who settled in Texas in those years, but even then their effect was slight.[3] The Galveston Movement directed many of its immigrants to small towns in remote parts of the state where there was little opportunity for them to maintain traditional religious practices or to speak the Yiddish language. Even in larger cities the newcomers were greenhorns, immersed in an unfamiliar American environment, and unlike their counterparts on the Lower East Side they did not have the numbers to dominate neighborhoods or to establish Yiddish-language and Orthodox institutions of their own. They augmented the membership of Conservative and Orthodox congregations but otherwise had little effect on the communities they entered.

Jews who had spent some time in New York, on the other hand, or in other major U.S. cities, arrived in greater numbers than the direct immigrants of the Galveston Movement, contributing between 1910 and 1920 to a near-doubling of the Texas-Jewish population from about 16,000 to more than 30,000.[4] Unlike the Galveston immigrants, these Jews were already Americanized when they arrived in Texas. They were experienced in the arts of democracy and community development, and they had a powerful and immediate impact on Texas

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[3] The *American Jewish Yearbook* estimates a 1908 Texas Jewish population of 16,000, while the *American Israelite* reported a 1914 Dallas Chamber of Commerce study that placed the state's Jewish population at 20,000, an increase of 4,000 people during the years of the Galveston Movement. In the same period, the Movement reported placing 2,144 immigrants in the state. *American Jewish Yearbook*; *American Israelite* (22 October 1914); "Statistics of Jewish Immigrants Who Arrived at the Port of Galveston, Texas, During the Years 1907-1913, Inclusive, Handled by 'Jewish Immigrants' Information Bureau' of Galveston, Texas," Henry Cohen Papers, AJA Manuscript Collection 263.

[4] *American Jewish Yearbook*. See Table 5 for observations on these figures.

communities. "These new people from out of the state," wrote Dallasite Irving Goldberg, "were more traditional in religion, more conscious of their Jewishness, more learned in Jewish concepts, and more desirous of Jewish grouping and ingathering."[5] Their presence in Dallas and the increasing influence they wielded within the city's Jewish community led to changes in the worship services of Dallas synagogues, especially as Conservative Judaism gained in numbers and as Reform temples, competing for new members, became more Conservative: "These tendencies," Goldberg observed, "connote a drift toward the middle and are making Jews less disparate religiously."[6] In addition to such institutional matters, Goldberg described "other impingements" for which the newcomers were responsible. These included the opening of "a kosher delicatessen within walking distance of a Neiman-Marcus store in a fashionable part of the city"; some amount of "self-segregation by Jews in public schools"; "problems arising from the observance of Jewish holidays in relation to attendance and public schools"; and, Goldberg remarked, "[s]ome who are native to Dallas now know a bagel when they see one." Goldberg's observations, while purely anecdotal, support his conclusion that a new sense of religious identity was forming in his city on the Jewish frontier. "All of these factors," he wrote, "have made the community more conscious of being Jewish, more identifiable as a group."[7] While Texas Jews remained on the geographical periphery of American Judaism, then, the

[5] Irving L. Goldberg, "The Changing Jewish Community of Dallas," *American Jewish Archives* 11 (April 1959): 83.
[6] Goldberg, 85.
[7] Goldberg, 87.

spiritual center, marked by religious traditionalism and a deep personal and communal sense of Jewish identification, came to them.

By referring to these developments as "impingements," Goldberg, a native Dallasite who was one of the city's most respected Jewish citizens (President Lyndon Johnson later made him the first Southern Jew to hold a federal judgeship), suggests that the migration of Northern Jews to Texas was an encroachment or a cultural collision. His comment hints that native Texas Jews were not entirely welcoming of the newcomers and their more conspicuously Jewish ways. Even as late as 1950 a Dallas parent, angry that Sunday school students were wrapping holiday gifts in the blue and white of the Israeli flag, exclaimed that "We're being taken over by another wave of immigrants," meaning New Yorkers.[8] Protective of the acculturationist traditions they had instituted, jealous of their status, perhaps even fearful of gentile reaction should Texas Jews become too visible, distinctive, or "pushy," German Jews in Texas held fast to their accustomed ways and resisted the efforts of newcomers to reshape their communities and institutions.[9] Seeking a place for themselves, Eastern European Jews therefore formed organizations of their own that reflected

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[8] David Ritz, "Inside the Jewish Establishment," *D, The Magazine of Dallas* 2 (November 1975): 111.

[9] In his study of an unnamed town in Mississippi, Theodore Lowi distinguished between "old" and "new" Jews in the community, those who were natives and those who were relatively recent newcomers from the North. The difference, he said, was not so much European origin as "degree of Southernness." Between the old and new groups lay "a middle group, perhaps Eastern European but definitely Yankee, who at least were born in the South, probably around the First World War or after. They are acceptable as old Jews if they are in acceptable businesses and are thought not to be too 'pushy' or too 'kikey.'" While I have found no similar language in records of Texas Jewry, there is little reason to believe that native Texas Jews felt any differently about the Yankees in their midst. Theodore Lowi, "Southern Jews: The Two Communities," *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 6 (July 1964): 107.

their traditional religion and liberal political views; they strengthened the state's small core of Zionist activists; and they forced congregations across the state to balance the competing wishes of Reform and Orthodox members. Such friction culminated in the "Houston Controversy" of 1943, when the state's largest and oldest congregation, Beth Israel, split over the issues of Zionism and congregants' freedom to practice their faith in more traditional ways. A time of great change, then, was also a time of great conflict as Jewish Texans struggled to redefine themselves and their evolving frontier community.

Certainly traditional Judaism was not new in Texas: Congregation Beth Israel had in fact begun as an Orthodox institution, and although it switched to a Reform service soon after the Civil War, all of the state's largest cities maintained a continuous traditional Jewish presence. Many communities employed *schochtim*, ritual slaughterers charged with preparing kosher meat, though only a segment of any community took advantage of their services. Traditional worshipers gathered *minyans* whenever possible, and even small towns like Brenham and Kilgore maintained synagogues that offered a traditional liturgy: Orthodox Jews in Brenham built a small synagogue designed in the style of a rural Baptist church and also established the state's first Orthodox cemetery.

Because of the relatively small number of Orthodox Jews in Texas, however, much of the burden of preserving traditional Judaism rested on the shoulders of especially dedicated individuals. Rabbi Ya'akov Geller, who immigrated from Galicia in 1892, and his wife, Sara, were a focal point of traditional Jewish belief, first in Galveston and later in Houston. According to a

family biographer, Sara remained "undaunted by the ridicule of members of the community who considered her old fashioned." She proudly retained her European style of dress, "including hair covering, despite the warm Texas climate." She periodically changed the color of her wig to suit her advancing age, "indicating that her purpose was a religious act, not [for] cosmetic reasons."[10] Sara and her husband maintained a home described as "a transplantation of European Jewish life on American soil," which served as "an oasis for many European Jews who yearned for a link to the Shtetl of their past." Like "the tent of our Patriarch Abraham in the desert," their biographer continues, "the Geller home radiated the warmth and splendor of Torah life."[11] Their son, Abram, remembered that their home "was a haven for all kinds of Jews: Rabbis, Cantors, schochtim, businessmen, mushulachim, schnorrers, beggars and new immigrants coming to Texas, to the 'Goldina Medeena.'"[12] During the years of the Galveston Movement, the Gellers opened their home to the more traditionally observant of the immigrants, providing them with kosher accommodations until the trains to their further destinations arrived. "To this day," Abram remarked in 1988, "I meet people who tell me their first kosher meal in America was cooked by my mother."[13] The Geller family has since produced a number of Orthodox rabbis and *mohels*, many of whom have remained in Texas.

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[10] Shmuel Geller, *Mazkeres Ahavah: Remembrance Of Love, A Biographical Account Of Rabbi Yaakov And Sara Geller And Family* (Zichron Yaakov, Israel: Institution for Publication of Books and Study of Manuscripts, 1988.): 32-33.
[11] Geller, *Mazkeres Ahavah*, 33.
[12] Abram Geller, "Remembering My Beloved Parents," in Geller, *Mazkeres Ahavah*, 47-48.
[13] Geller, "Remembering My Beloved Parents," 48.

When the Conservative congregation in San Antonio, Adugas Achim, opened a Talmud Torah, a Hebrew school, around 1920, the director was a New Yorker named Epstein. "He was an excellent pedagogue," recalled Alexander Gurwitz, "and he taught the children 'Hebrew in Hebrew,' that is, translating the Hebrew text into simpler Hebrew, rather than into English or Yiddish." Epstein also established a "Hebrew speaking club" so adults could gather regularly to speak with one another in the ancient language. "It was a spiritually uplifting and exhilarating experience," wrote Gurwitz, "and sheer joy." When Epstein returned to New York, however, the school closed and the speaking club disbanded.[14]

Similarly, the Jewish tradition of scholarship also found a home in Texas. Jewish scholarship occurred in small ways, first through the work of isolated individual rabbis. Rabbi Heinrich Schwarz of Hempstead, a Talmudically trained scholar, writer and linguist, directed a small family-run *shul* in the tiny town and offered guidance to other scholars of Judaism in the state. Jacob Voorsanger, a rabbi in Houston in the 1880s and later in San Francisco, made regular trips to Hempstead to study with Schwarz. Voorsanger described his mentor in the *American Israelite* as "one of the best Jewish scholars in the country. . . . The constant flow of wisdom that proceeds from his lips is of exceeding benefit."[15] Rabbi Ya'akov Geller helped organize a small Talmudic study circle in Galveston.[16] And in 1927, Rabbi Abraham Schechter of Houston's Orthodox

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[14] Alexander Ziskind Gurwitz, *Memories of Two Generations*, tr. Amram Prero, vol. 2 [c.1932]: 236.
[15] Koppel Von Bloomborg [Jacob Voorsanger], "Lone Star Flashes," *American Israelite* (19 October 1880).
[16] Geller, *Mazkeres Ahavah*, 28.

Congregation Adath Yeshurun directed the creation of the Kallah of Texas Rabbis, an organization of rabbis from across the state who met regularly "for the purpose of exchanging views along the lines of Jewish scholarship."[17] The Kallah published the papers presented at its meetings, which covered subjects ranging from Talmudic exegesis to Jewish history to interpretations of Jewish ethics. "The contents of this volume," wrote Rabbi Samuel Rosinger in his foreword to one such collection, "represent only a drop in the ocean of Jewish scholarship, but in the Texan desert a small canteen of water often serves as a life saver."[18]

Along with these spiritual and scholarly connections to traditional Judaism, a number of small organizations dedicated to the preservation of secular Jewish identity, many containing elements of the radicalism that was a staple of Eastern European Jewish politics, appeared in Texas. Around 1930, Rabbi Gurwitz noted the presence in San Antonio of a group of people he disparagingly regarded as "Jews without a synagogue . . . the Socialist Yiddishists, the secular Jews." Because "the religious core of Judaism was not for them," Gurwitz wrote, they needed "no synagogue for themselves, nor a Religious School for their children." They had organized several secular institutions in San Antonio, most of which, according to Gurwitz, "were affiliated with the *Poale Zion* (Workers of Zion, the Socialist Zionist Party), or the *Arbeiter Ring* (Workmen's Circle)." While Gurwitz disdained these Jews' lack of religious devotion, he applauded their social and cultural involvement. "These 'radicals,'" he wrote, "were

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[17] Abraham Schechter, ed. *The Kallah: An Annual Convention Of Texas Rabbis* (March 1928): 11.
[18] Samuel Rosinger, ed. *The Kallah: An Annual Convention Of Texas Rabbis, Year Book 5696* (1935): 1.

passionate devotees of Zionism. They collected, and gave, much money for the cause of Zion Rebuilt." They also "took leading roles in the attempts to rescue our poor Jewish brothers and sisters trapped in the post-World War European trap" and had in fact taken "leading roles in all of our Jewish institutions – except the synagogues, of course – with commendable zeal and generosity. Their wives took part in every communal charity endeavor, be it Jewish or general."[19]

Similar organizations existed in other Texas cities. Waco Jews chartered a Workmen's Circle in 1912, which sponsored charitable efforts on behalf of European victims of World War I, consumptive hospitals, immigrant aid, and workers in Palestine; a Ladies' Auxiliary formed in 1931 to support similar efforts.[20] In Galveston, Freida and Itzik Weiner were founding members of an *Arbeiterring*, most of whose members had been Bundists in Russia. Freida was the chapter's first secretary, held local and regional offices in the organization for some sixty years, and was a regular subscriber to the *Jewish Daily Forward*, the socialist Yiddish-language newspaper published in New York. In later years, Freida traveled throughout the state encouraging the preservation of the Yiddish language. She formed several Yiddish speaking groups for adults and children in the Houston area and helped establish Yiddish language classes at the Houston Jewish Community Center.[21]

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[19] Gurwitz, 277-78.

[20] *Congregation Agudath Jacob Golden Jubilee Year Book, 1884-1934* (Waco, 1934): 29-30. TJHS Box 3A173, Folder 6.

[21] Phyllis Weiner, "Freida Weiner," TJHS Box 3A167, Folder 3; "Freida Weiner – The 96 Years Young Dynamo," *Jewish Daily Forward* (7 November 1986), clipping in TJHS Box 3A167, Folder 3; Susan Ganc, "Vos Machstu, You-all – or – Yiddish in Houston," *Jewish Herald-Voice* (2 April 1988).

Eva Green of Houston also brought her native Yiddish and leftist politics with her to Texas. "She was not an ardent ritual observer and did not hold us to such practices," recalled her son, Louis, but she had received a great deal of Jewish education and "knew her Hebrew well – reading, writing and using this beautiful language in the synagogue." Eva "was quite liberal as regards the secular world," Leon wrote. "She could actually be grouped with that large immigrant group who sought consolation in not relying on a God which had failed them the past 300-400 years and relying on their own efforts to bring about change." Eva was active in the "center-core of the left wing of the Democratic Party and even of a then strong Socialist party," and on one occasion she took her young son to meet Norman Thomas, the seven-time Socialist Party presidential candidate.[22]

Organizations with their roots in Eastern European politics and Orthodox Jewish practice, however, were quite small in comparison to the dominant Jewish communal institutions. Freida Weiner estimated that at their peak of activity between 1910 and 1930, the Galveston *Arbeiterring* had about twenty-five members, the Houston branch seventy or eighty, and the Dallas branch, the state's largest, about 100 members, as well as its own building which housed a small synagogue and religious school.[23] In comparison, Dallas's Temple Emanu-El boasted about 275 congregants in 1919, while by 1931 Houston's Congregation

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[22] Louis Green, untitled prose history, TJHS Box 3A165, Folder 2. I have changed Green's "3-400 years" to "300-400 years."

[23] Ruthe Winegarten, notes from interview with Freida Weiner (2 May 1988), TJHS Box 3A167, Folder 3.

Beth Israel operated a religious school with 375 students.[24] Nevertheless, the arrival of traditional Jews in ever-larger numbers greatly enhanced the available resources and facilities for the practice of Judaism.

Between 1910 and 1920, the Texas Jewish population nearly doubled, and by 1940 it grew almost another 50%, a total increase from about 16,000 to nearly 50,000 by the outbreak of World War II (See Table 5).[25] Whether directly from Europe as part of the Galveston Movement, or passing through rich centers of Jewish religion and culture like New York, these new arrivals brought with them a sense of Judaism seldom seen in Texas before. "At home, in the small *shtedtl* in Lithuania where he lived, he was a respectable, pious Jew," wrote Alexander Gurwitz of his brother-in-law, Z. Lifshutz of San Antonio. "No, more than pious, he was a religious fanatic. He brought to America all of his small town ways, casting none of them into the ocean on the trip over. In fact, he gathered up all of the old world obsolete nonsense which the other passengers left on the ship, made a package of them, and brought them with him, intact, to America!"[26] The Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 effectively extinguished direct Jewish immigration from Europe, and while a small number of refugees from the Nazis arrived in Texas in the 1930s and a handful of others sought a way into the state through Mexico, these were a tiny proportion of the immigrants arriving in Texas

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[24] Gerry Cristol, *A Light in the Prairie: Temple Emanu-El of Dallas, 1872-1997* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1998): 78-79; Anne Nathan Cohen, *The Centenary History, Congregation Beth Israel of Houston, Texas, 1854-1954* [1954]: 47.
[25] *American Jewish Yearbook*.
[26] Gurwitz, 224.

Table 5. Jewish and General Population of Texas, 1880-1940.

Year	Jewish Population	Growth	General Population	Growth
1880	3,300	----	1,591,749	-----
1890	n/a	n/a	2,235,527	40%
1900	15,000	n/a	3,048,710	36%
1910	16,000	7%	3,896,542	28%
1920	30,839	93%*	4,663,228	20%
1930	46,648	51%	5,824,715	25%
1940	49,196	5%	6,414,824	10%

Sources: For Jewish population, 1880: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, *Statistics of the Jews of the United States* (Cincinnati: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1880): 55. For Jewish population, 1900-1940: *American Jewish Yearbook*. For Texas population: U.S. Census as reported in "United States Historical Census Data Browser" <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/census> [Accessed 20 December 2002].

*The phenomenal population growth of the 1910s is partly attributable to the Galveston Movement, which was active from 1908 to 1914 and settled approximately 2,000 Eastern European Jews in Texas. It is also likely that the figures reported in the *American Jewish Yearbook*, which were revised only intermittently, are faulty: the *Yearbook* reported a Jewish population of 15,000 in 1899, updated this estimate to just 16,000 in 1907, then reprinted that figure annually for ten years until finally reporting a population of 30,839 in 1917. It is almost certain that the Jewish population of Texas grew steadily between *Yearbook* revisions, and that the 1910 figure cited here is an underestimate.

at that time.[27] It is safe to assume, therefore, that nearly every Jewish arrival in Texas between the World Wars had spent some time elsewhere in America, most

[27] Jewish refugees traveling through Mexico hoped either to become Mexican citizens and then enter the U.S. as part of the quota of Mexican immigrants, or to enter illegally across the border. In 1921, Rabbi Martin Zielonka of El Paso became deeply involved in an effort to help dozens of Jewish refugees whom Mexican authorities had detained in Cíudad Juárez, across the border from El Paso. He visited them in Juárez, tried to provide for their material and spiritual comfort, and made meticulous records of their identities and individual circumstances. Other Texas rabbis faced similar problems on a smaller scale: Zielonka reported that Henry Cohen "has the problem in a very small way due to stoways [sic]" arriving at the Galveston port, and Sidney Tedesche of San Antonio wired Zielonka in March of 1921 asking what he could do to help fourteen Jewish refugees detained at the border crossing in Laredo. Zielonka enlisted the help of national Jewish organizations like the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), but when Jewish leaders hesitated to provide assistance to immigrants who sought illegal entry into the U.S., Zielonka worked with B'nai B'rith to promote the development of Jewish communities in Mexico, becoming one of the nation's most prominent rabbinical experts of Mexico's Jewish immigrant community. Martin Zielonka, Records of immigrants detained in Juarez (March 1921), "Names of the Young Immigrants Still in Juarez, March 1, 1921," and "Report of Rabbi Zielonka's Trip to N.Y. March 23rd, 1921," AJA Small Collection 5345. See also Martin Zielonka, "The Mexican Situation: A

commonly in New York City. With its vibrant and absorbing Jewish culture, New York offered an environment in which their traditional religious beliefs, politics, language, culture and customs could thrive. When immigrants went to Texas, they took these ways of life with them.

Rabbi Gurwitz, whose account of his life in San Antonio is one of the best sources available on traditional Judaism in Texas, provided a detailed picture of the religious and institutional changes occurring because of the influx of Orthodox and Conservative Jews into Texas cities. Gurwitz described in rich detail – and with caustic irony – the growth of his community from an outpost of Judaism on his arrival in 1910 to a condition that he felt was, at least, better. When he first came to San Antonio, the city offered few opportunities for the practice of traditional Judaism:

> The synagogue was closed all week, for there was never a Daily Minyan (morning service). If someone had a yahrzeit (anniversary of a family death), or was in mourning, and he wanted to recite the Kaddish, he was obliged to go up and down "Jerusalem Street." (It was called this, because on it were many of the Jewish stores.) There he could gather ten men for Minchah and Ma'ariv Services. Friday evening, for the Welcoming of the Sabbath Service, the Shamas barely scraped together a minyan (ten male Jews). Saturday morning it was not much better. Several more than a minyan came, essentially the older, retired people, or those who had no business of their own. The store owners, of course, could not bear to leave their places of business and come to the synagogue. For the best business day was Saturday. The workingman collects his weekly wage at the anticipated Saturdays, when they could rest, attend Services, relax, have a

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Study in Present-Day American Jewish Philanthropy," *B'nai B'rith News* 14 (September 1921): 1-2; Martin A. Zielonka, "The Jew in Mexico," *Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook* 33 (1923): 425-443; Joseph L. Weinberger, *Report Of The B'nai B'rith Mexican Bureau*, AJA Microfilm 1606; Hollace Ava Weiner, *Jewish Stars in Texas: Rabbis And Their Work* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1999): 102-109; and Haim Avni, "The Role of Latin America in Immigration and Rescue During the Nazi Era (1933-1945): A General Approach and Mexico as a Case Study," Colloquium Paper (11 June 1986), AJA Miscellaneous File.

> spiritual uplifting, so here in America they waited keenly for the Sabbath, when they could "do good business." They all had their stores open on Saturdays, for they all insisted that without the Saturday trade they would go bankrupt.[28]

Gurwitz also described the dearth of trained Jewish clergy in the city: one man, Reb Solomon, performed every ritual function, serving as a cantor, *schochet*, services leader, *mohel*, wedding officiant, and Hebrew teacher. Gurwitz lamented the absence of a genuine Rav but, he acknowledged with barely concealed bitterness, there really was no need: "Ritual questions nobody had, and rabbinical arbitration they did not need, and obscure points of Jewish law they cared nothing for." Solomon provided "all the skills that the Jewish community required."[29]

By the time Gurwitz completed his memoirs in 1935, however, he was able to describe Agudas Achim, the Conservative congregation, as the largest in San Antonio, alongside a large Reform congregation, Beth El, and a smaller Orthodox one, Rodfei Sholom; seminary-trained rabbis served all three groups. Agudas Achim, to which Gurwitz belonged, offered a *minyan* twice daily and traditional Friday evening services, still too few for Gurwitz's satisfaction, but nevertheless "the fact is that there is a Service daily – something we did not have [before]."[30] A Talmud Torah, where Gurwitz taught for many years, provided Hebrew lessons under the guidance of trained instructors, and plans for a Jewish Community Center were under discussion. With the addition of these facilities,

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[28] Gurwitz, 215-16.
[29] Gurwitz, 216-17.
[30] Gurwitz, 276.

Gurwitz looked to the future with "very real hope that the Jewish upbringing of our children may prosper and thrive."[31]

While the influx of more traditional Jews provided the critical mass necessary to create new and richer Jewish institutions, communities still struggled to find ways to balance the wishes and needs of the newcomers with the entrenched ways of doing religious business. Particularly in small towns that could not afford multiple congregations, rabbis and worshipers had to seek compromise. Gurwitz, again, provided an insightful description of the condition of these small-town congregations:

> In the small towns further out from San Antonio, there are small numbers of Jews. Nevertheless, in each of these country towns, the Jews are divided as they are in our city: Traditional Jews and German Jews. Since they cannot afford to have two synagogues, and two rabbis, most of them have one synagogue, in partnership, with one Rabbi serving both theological groups. In order not to discriminate, the Rabbi stands at the Ark, but the worshippers are seated at each side of the synagogue. The Rabbi addresses each side, in turn, and delivers his sermons accordingly.
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> On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, however, the Rabbi has his work cut out for him. For the German Jews he conducts the Service without a hat, and he faces them during the entire Service. Then he puts on his yarmulke, turns to the other side, faces the Ark, and conducts the Orthodox Service. After this, he turns to the center, so that he is addressing both sides, and he delivers his sermon to both sides simultaneously![32]

At Gurwitz's own synagogue, Agudas Achim, the blending of Reform and Orthodox elements resulted in "a completely Conservative congregation," a ritual based on pragmatic compromise. "Women sit with their husbands," he wrote, "although there is a women's gallery. But there only the older piously observant

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[31] Gurwitz, 281.
[32] Gurwitz, 279-80.

women sit. They cannot bring themselves to sit alongside men in a sacred place." Sabbath services, and those on the High Holy Days, were recited in their entirety "precisely in the Orthodox fashion," but on Fridays, after the traditional sunset service, a more liberal "Late Service" was conducted in which "[t]he cantor sings, with the choir accompanying him, and the rabbi delivers his sermon in English."[33]

The Jews of Brownsville, and especially Sam Perl, their lay leader for more than fifty years, also took a pragmatic approach to balancing the needs of a diverse community. Members of Perl's congregation "came from areas as dissimilar as Mexico, Russia, and the northeastern United States," according to a community historian. "They had different backgrounds, spoke different languages, and followed different philosophies of Judaism." Perl himself described the temple as having "a mixed congregation – some of them of the reformed branch – many from the conservative and some from the orthodox – so we conduct our service in a manner that will be pleasing to most of them." This approach, adds the historian, "worked reasonably well most of the time and enabled the varied segments of the Brownsville Jewish population to worship together under one roof."[34]

In other cases, compromise was less successful. When the question of building a synagogue – "the 'shul' problem," as resident Albert Granoff described it – arose in Laredo in 1936, conflict immediately erupted between Reform and Orthodox members of the congregation. "The Reform group wanted to put the

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[33] Gurwitz, 275-76.

[34] Harriet Denise Joseph, "The Brownsville Jewish Community: From Generation to Generation" (March 1990): 5-6, TJHS Box 3A169, Folder 6.

question to a vote, but the outnumbered Orthodox group was against it," Granoff remembered. "The Orthodox group suggested we take in new members, but the Reform group caught on. They knew that these new members would be the newcomers to America, and they were all Orthodox." Eventually the Reform group, which had contributed more money to the cause than their Orthodox counterparts, resolved to build a Reform temple and to pay off their Orthodox members with cash toward a future synagogue of their own. As Granoff worked to raise money for the temple, Orthodox members of the community resented his efforts; when, with the temple completed, Granoff invited a member of the Orthodox group to speak at the dedication ceremony, Reformers in the community turned against him as well.[35] Differences between the two groups proved difficult, if not impossible to resolve.

Even within traditional synagogues, rabbis and lay leaders had difficulty maintaining the strictest standards among their members. Creeping accommodation to American ways led some rabbis and congregations to enforce Jewish law and tradition among their unwilling members. In 1920, the directors of Temple Beth-El, the Reform congregation in San Antonio, passed a resolution requiring members to "observe the New Year and Day of Atonement by keeping their places of business closed on said holidays," closures which business owners

[35] Albert L. Granoff, "To America with Love," 169-171, AJA Small Collection 4215. Granoff's statement that the newcomers to Laredo "were all Orthodox" (p. 169) is probably an exaggeration and demonstrates the relative nature of these terms: compared to Laredo's liberal and acculturated Jewish community, the newcomers from the North may have seemed "Orthodox," but they were probably not literally all Orthodox Jews in terms of their prior religious affiliations.

had previously performed voluntarily.[36] Similarly, in 1936, Rabbi J.M. Rosenberg of Waco's Conservative Congregation Agudath Jacob felt obliged to send a letter to his congregants explaining his new policy of requiring them to sit *shivas* for members who had died. It was possible, he wrote, to appoint "several people in our community . . . to act as professional mourners," but it was preferable that "there should be a more friendly spirit existing in our community and that there should be present several members of our Congregation on every sad occasion." To facilitate this, the rabbi and the congregation's board of directors decided that "the secretary shall place the name of every member in a container and the president will withdraw six names every time a death occurs in our community."[37]

These examples suggest that even as newcomers were arriving with a more deeply held sense of themselves as Jews, many older Texas Jewish families were becoming more acculturated. Isaac Kempner, whose father was one of the founders of Temple B'nai Israel in Galveston, described himself in 1953 as coming from a "decidedly Jewish" background which was changing over time: "All grandparents lived kosher," he wrote on an autobiographical survey form, "but my father and mother embraced Reform Judaism." None of Kempner's children, he reported, had converted away from Judaism, but three had intermarried with Christians.[38] Galveston's Rabbi Henry Cohen, whose

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[36] Minutes of Temple Beth-El (August 1920), quoted in William Sajowitz, *History Of Reform Judaism In San Antonio, Texas, 1874-1941* (Master's Thesis, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1945): 68.

[37] J.M. Rosenberg to Members of Agudath Jacob, Waco (10 November 1936), Waco, Congregation Agudath Jacob Papers, AJA Small Collection 12655.

[38] Isaac H. Kempner, "Response to American Jewish Archives Autobiographical Questionnaire" (9 February 1953). AJA Small Collections.

commitment to Reform Judaism seemed to grow steadier as he aged, declined numerous job offers from larger congregations around the nation, at least once because "he had left British Conservative Judaism for American Reform and didn't want to go back to cap and tallis."[39] Equating his style of Reform Judaism with a non-Zionist ideology, Cohen complained that "[y]ear after year, the Freshman admitted to the Hebrew Union College are of Orthodox parentage, bound up in Zionism," and while it was fine if students raised in Orthodox homes sought Reform pulpits, acceptable changes in ritual were "often over-shadowed by nationalistic tendencies to which I am utterly opposed. To my thinking, the College should uproot them!" Isaac Wise, Cohen concluded, had rightly emphasized "*American* Judaism."[40]

The connection Cohen made between Orthodox Judaism and Zionism was a logical one: most of the traditional Jews entering Texas brought with them a passion for Jewish nationalism, and their presence in customarily non-Zionist communities was a source of great tension. One incident dramatically reflects the crises that occurred on a smaller scale within many Texas synagogues as a result of the changing Jewish population. In 1943, Congregation Beth Israel of Houston, the state's oldest and largest Reform congregation, divided over the

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[39] Anne Nathan and Harry I. Cohen, *The Man Who Stayed In Texas: The Life Of Rabbi Henry Cohen* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1941): 281. In 1915, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise wrote to Cohen that he was "of the hope that some day in the near future you may be moved to feel that you have served Galveston long and faithfully enough and take up your ministry in New York." The next year, Wise officially invited Cohen to New York, offering to "set you free to do work as General Chaplain of the Community." Wise knew, he said, "how you have given yourself to Texas," but that New York "needs every aid and reinforcement that can be brought." Cohen refused, choosing to remain in Texas until the end of his life. Stephen S. Wise to Henry Cohen (20 August 1915, 21 November 1916), Henry Cohen Papers, AJA Manuscript Collection 263.
[40] Henry Cohen to Israel Friedlander (10 June 1942), Henry Cohen Papers, AJA Manuscript Collection 263.

issue of Zionism and, in a broader sense, the degree to which the Temple should oppose the appearance of traditional forms of Jewish practice such as the wearing of yarmulkes and kosher dietary restrictions. The "Houston Controversy" was rooted in a changing Jewish population: new members' needs, expectations and political views differed markedly from those of the native Texans who led the congregation. As Houston experienced extraordinary growth – between 1920 and 1940 the population of Harris County nearly tripled – Congregation Beth Israel also grew quickly.[41] Its membership of 309 families in 1920 more than doubled to 807 in 1943, necessitating the construction of new religious school buildings and cemetery facilities and causing the congregation to outgrow its temple twice.[42] The newcomers were not, on the whole, from the German-Jewish background that characterized Beth Israel's core membership but were, according to the Temple's *Centenary History*, an "influx of Eastern European Jewry into the Reform congregation." These were not immigrants fresh from the boats, moreover, writes historian Anne Nathan Cohen, but people who had been "already living in many [American] communities since 1914" and who had begun to leave "Orthodox traditions and were gradually drawn to the [Reform] Temples." Beth Israel was Houston's only Reform congregation, so these newcomers, who were "largely members of the 'new middle class' of Eastern European and more traditional background," joined in large numbers. "This

[41] The population of Harris County, in which the City of Houston dominates, was 186,667 in 1920 and 528,961 in 1940. U.S. Census, as reported in "United States Historical Census Data Browser" <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/census> [Accessed 30 January 2003].
[42] Cohen, *Centenary History*, 40, 53.

group," Ms. Cohen observes, "was predominantly Zionist, as opposed to the non-Zionism" which was prevalent in the congregation.[43]

Some of the new members may have been attracted to Beth Israel by the involvement of Robert Kahn, the son of a progressive Jewish family in Iowa who was hired as assistant rabbi at Beth Israel in 1935. Young and dynamic, Kahn was hired to strengthen the congregation's religious school and youth activities, and he attributed Beth Israel's growing numbers of Orthodox members to the fact that "the children of orthodox Jews were being sent because it was a good religious school and they were getting from the Talmud Torah what they wanted." In contrast to the temple's lay leadership and to the senior rabbi, Henry Barnston, Kahn described himself as a cultural Zionist, a supporter of the advancement of Jewish religious and cultural institutions in Palestine as a means of recreating a center of Jewish life and learning. "I believed that somehow, a concentration of Jews living in Israel, and therefore, not having to [adapt] to another's culture, another's civilization, could recreate the kind of things that led to the prophets, led to the Talmud, led to the great flowering of Jewish intellectual and spiritual civilization."[44] In line with this view, Kahn introduced more Hebrew language study into Beth Israel's curriculum and emphasized Jewish solidarity, the belief that "all Jews are responsible, or [are] comrades one to another." Among older temple members, however, opposition to such an approach was clear. One mother complained to the rabbi, insisting that "I'm not going to be responsible for

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[43] Cohen, *Centenary History*, 53.
[44] Louis J. Marchiafava and David Courtwright, Interview with Robert I. Kahn (6 August 1975): 22, TJHS Box 3A174, Folder 7.

all Jews. Don't teach that to my children." Kahn was surprised, as later events unfolded, to discover "how deep this sentiment was."[45] Indeed, Beth Israel's president, Leopold Meyer, described his congregation as "uncompromising and unalterably Reform in manner of worship and definitely non-Zionist ideologically."[46]

Temple leaders, intent on preserving the acculturationist tradition of Reform Judaism that had come to be known as "Classical Reform," saw a grave danger in the growing number of traditionalist and Zionist members in their congregation. "To the concern that control of the congregation would be lost to new members," writes Anne Nathan Cohen, "was added intense devotion to the principles of non-Zionist Reform Judaism, which principles, it was felt, would also be lost should the new members gain control."[47] Israel Friedlander, a former congregational president who played a key role in the Houston Controversy, felt that the problem originated with "[f]orces and influences outside of the Congregation membership, some local and some national" who "sought to control the future of Beth Israel Congregation." Their goal, he continued, "was not American Reform Judaism, to which our efforts have been and are dedicated, but to [Jewish] nationalism." They sought "to swerve the destiny of Beth Israel toward a rapprochement with traditional or conservative Judaism and, of course, in the interest of political Zionism." It was clear to Friedlander and other Temple leaders that they had to prevent such a power shift from occurring. "It was the

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[45] Author's interview with Robert I. Kahn (7 October 1995).
[46] Leopold Meyer, "Report of the President on Behalf of the Board of Trustees," in *Annual Report, Congregation Beth Israel, Houston, Texas* (Houston, 1944): 24.
[47] Cohen, *Centenary History*, 54.

great emancipator who said that 'a nation cannot endure half-slave and half-free,'" Friedlander wrote, identifying with a mythic American tradition. "It is equally axiomatic that a congregation cannot endure and attain for its membership the highest spiritual aspirations, 'half-traditional and half-reform.'" [48] The division that would tear Beth Israel in two was emblematic of a larger division within American Jewry, so that the Houston Controversy was more than a local congregational battle but "the last determined stand of 'classical' Reform against the inroads of Zionist sentiment," according to historian Howard Greenstein.[49]

The ideology Friedlander represented and shared with the majority of Beth Israel's members accorded with increasingly outmoded definitions of Classical Reform. In 1885, as large numbers of Orthodox Jews from Eastern Europe were beginning to arrive in American cities, Reform rabbis gathered in Pittsburgh to formulate a set of principles to guide the Reform movement in America. The statement they ratified, known as the Pittsburgh Platform, provided a touchstone for lay and clerical leaders of American temples for a generation. The Pittsburgh Platform legitimized a tendency in the United States to match Jewish religious practices to gentile patterns, making Judaism superficially indistinct from Christian worship and permitting congregations to determine the relevance of traditional requirements on their own rather than by reverting to biblical or Talmudic authority. "Talmudic injunctions on dietary laws, on dress, on the second-day observance of festival events, on the separation of the sexes, were

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[48] Israel Friedlander, "Report of the Policy Formulation Committee" (30 May 1944): 1-2, Congregation Beth Israel Papers, AJA Manuscript Collection 132.
[49] Howard R. Greenstein, *Turning Point: Zionism and Reform Judaism* (Chico, Cal.: Scholars Press, 1981): 52.

subject to review," writes historian Howard M. Sachar. "Even Sunday services might be acceptable for Jews unable to attend conventional Shabbat (Saturday) devotions."[50] Regarding the nascent movement to establish a Jewish political state, these rabbis declared unanimously that "we consider ourselves no longer a nation but a religious community, and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine . . . nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state."[51] Thus a belief in Judaism as a religious choice which might coexist with other religious alternatives in a pluralistic society, rather than as a distinct national identity, became the quasi-official position of American Reform Judaism. When the Zionist movement began to evolve in the late nineteenth century, this view of American Reform necessitated opposition to it.

As support for Zionism grew, however, especially following the Balfour Declaration of 1917, the national institutions of American Reform Judaism slowly began to shift toward the ideas of Jewish nationality and a Jewish homeland, though these ideas remained extreme minority views among Jews in Texas. In 1931, a survey reported by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) found that "despite the traditional opposition of Reform Judaism to Zionism in the past, we find one member of every five families enrolled in the Zionist Organization of America or Hadassah,"[52] though these organizations remained weak in peripheral communities like Texas. The rise of the Nazis in Germany sped the movement of American Reform institutions toward a Zionist

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[50] Howard M. Sachar, *A History of the Jews in America* (New York: Knopf, 1992): 112.
[51] Quoted in Greenstein, 19.
[52] Abraham Franzblau, *Reform Judaism in the Large Cities – A Survey* (Cincinnati: UAHC, 1931), quoted in Greenstein, 26.

position: the membership of Zionist organizations climbed from 807,000 in 1935 to nearly 1.5 million by 1945, establishing "a virtual Zionist consensus," according to historian Henry L. Feingold, "which has characterized American Jewry ever since."[53] To the authors of the Pittsburgh Platform, liberalized religious practice, Americanism, and non-Zionism were all of a piece, all expressions of the wish to identify with American culture rather than with any sense of separate Jewish nationhood. Under the influence of a new Eastern European majority, however, American Jewry was coming around to the idea that it was possible to be both a loyal American citizen and a supporter of Jewish national sovereignty.

In response to this changing attitude, the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) met in Columbus, Ohio, in 1937 to endorse a revision of the Pittsburgh Platform. The Columbus Platform rejected the earlier statement, restoring the primacy of traditional Jewish practices including, as Howard Sachar explains, "observance of the Saturday (rather than Sunday) Sabbath, the historic Jewish festivals and holy days, and the bar mitzvah (rather than the fashionable 'confirmation' of classical Reform.)"[54] While these were controversial proposals, the Columbus Platform was most significant for its ringing endorsement of cultural Zionism, proclaiming that the "rehabilitation of Palestine," that is the revival of a Jewish cultural presence there, offered "the promise of renewed life for many of our brethren," and so "[w]e affirm the obligation of all Jewry to aid in

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[53] Henry L. Feingold, *Zion in America: the Jewish Experience from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1981 [1974]): 281.
[54] Sachar, 397.

its upbuilding as a Jewish homeland by endeavoring to make it not only a haven of refuge for the oppressed but also a center of Jewish culture and spiritual life."[55] The rabbis stopped short of explicitly supporting an attempt to form a sovereign Jewish state, but the drift toward that position was clear in the Platform's language. Among the rabbis in attendance, however, support for even this moderate statement was shaky: the Platform passed by only a single vote, whereas the non-Zionist Pittsburgh Platform fifty years earlier had been sustained unanimously. The Columbus meeting, then, exposed a deep and growing rift within the American rabbinical community, particularly over the Zionist issue. "Rather than having settled the question," writes Howard Greenstein, "it might be argued that the new Guiding Principles set the stage for the most bitter period of all in the battle over Zionism."[56]

The combatants in that battle were revealed in 1942 when Rabbi Louis Wolsey of Philadelphia convened a meeting of non-Zionist Reform rabbis in Atlantic City to protest the Zionist drift in the CCAR and to plan a response. Nearly eighty participants, identifying themselves as "Rabbis in American Israel," signed a statement endorsing the "universalism" of Judaism and expressing a concern that the "absorption of large numbers in Jewish nationalistic endeavors" tended "to reduce the religious basis of Jewish life to a place of secondary importance." While they offered "unstinted aid" to their brethren in Palestine, they explained that they were "unable to subscribe to or support the political emphasis now paramount in the Zionist program." They feared, in particular, that

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[55] Quoted in Greenstein, 29.
[56] Greenstein, 30.

"Jewish nationalism tends to confuse not only our coreligionists but our fellow citizens of other faiths in regard to our place and function in society."[57] They were concerned, that is, that gentiles would think them less American (and therefore, presumably, less welcome in America) if Zionists persisted in describing the Jewish people as a separate nation. They reiterated that position in a later "Statement of Principles" which asserted that "American Jews reject the idea of Jewish nationalism" and "desire no other homeland, political or otherwise, than the United States and no other citizenship, actual or emotional, than American citizenship." [58] By the end of 1942, the group had organized formally as the American Council for Judaism (ACJ), incorporated in New York, adopted a constitution, and elected Rabbi Elmer Berger of Flint, Michigan, as Executive Director. By 1946, following a national membership drive, the ACJ had established local chapters across the country and regional offices in Richmond, Chicago, Dallas and San Francisco.[59]

While the ACJ drew its support from all over the nation, it was especially strong in the South, including Texas. Carolyn Lipson-Walker, describing Southern Jews as "the most rabid American Jewish anti-Zionists," noted that "one-third of the twenty rabbis who made up the first Board of Directors of the American Council for Judaism were from Southern congregations" while "one

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[57] Untitled declaration of principles (22 June 1942), Louis Wolsey Papers, AJA Manuscript Collection 15.
[58] "Statement of Principles," American Council for Judaism Papers, AJA Manuscript Collection 17.
[59] "An Inventory to the American Council for Judaism Collection," AJA Manuscript Collection 17.

half of the total Board hailed from the South or Southwest."[60] An ACJ membership list from 1943 bears out Lipson-Walker's conclusion, showing that some 40% of the organization's members lived in Southern states, even though a tiny percentage of the nation's Jews were Southerners (See Table 6). The list also demonstrates the group's strong support in Texas, which, with many fewer Jews, had more ACJ members than any other state. Houston alone had twice as many members as New York and more than any other city except Philadelphia.[61] ACJ members, moreover, were among the most prominent Jews in Texas communities and included several rabbis: Beth Israel's Henry Barnston, Dallas's David Lefkowitz, and San Antonio's Ephraim Frisch attended the Atlantic City meeting and signed the Statement of Principles; Henry Cohen declined to attend because of his advanced age but sent a telegram to the conference in support of its goals.[62]

Henry Barnston, chief rabbi at Beth Israel since 1900, was especially vocal in his support of the ACJ's mission, drafting a letter to the delegates in Atlantic City in which he stated that "the day when Zionism was launched was one of the most tragic in Jewish history." The move toward identifying Judaism as a separate nation, he wrote, "will not fit in with the Anglo-Saxon civilization amidst which we live and may forever brand us as strangers in a strange land." He also expressed his view that American rabbis would do well to "bring some pressure to bear upon the younger Rabbis to enlist as Chaplains" and to refrain

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[60] Carolyn Lipson-Walker, "'Shalom Y'all'": The Folklore and Culture of Southern Jews" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Indiana University, 1986): 117.
[61] "Membership List" (30 November 1943), AJA Manuscript Collection 17.
[62] "Report of Replies for Atlantic City Meeting" (27 May 1942); Telegram, Henry Cohen to Rabbi Louis Wolsey (1 June 1942), AJA Manuscript Collection 17.

Table 6. Membership in the American Council for Judaism, by Region, State and Major Cities, November 1943.

Location	ACJ Members	Location	ACJ Members
South	*396*	*Midwest*	*194*
Alabama	6	Illinois	18
Arkansas	1	Chicago	17
Florida	4	Indiana	14
Georgia	25	Iowa	3
Savannah	18	Michigan	50
Kentucky	1	Flint	35
Louisiana	104	Missouri	37
Baton Rouge	19	St. Louis	31
New Orleans	83	Ohio	60
Mississippi	17	Cincinnati	43
North Carolina	1	Cleveland	12
Oklahoma	7	Wisconsin	12
South Carolina	1		
Tennessee	1	*Northeast*	*362*
Texas	202	Connecticut	3
Dallas	35	Dist. of Columbia	2
Ft. Worth	7	Maryland	102
Galveston	3	Baltimore	102
Houston	105	Massachusetts	18
San Antonio	52	New Jersey	6
Virginia	24	New York	58
Richmond	16	New York City	55
West Virginia	2	Pennsylvania	172
		Philadelphia	161
West	*62*	Vermont	1
Arizona	3		
California	30		
San Francisco	25		
Colorado	1		
New Mexico	1		
Oregon	16		
Washington	11		

Source: "Membership List," American Council for Judaism Papers, AJA Manuscript Collection 17. City totals are for cities listed separately in the source document. Figures for city membership are included in the composite state figures above them.

from endorsing "idealistic papers on peace when the Nation is engaged in total war and its continued existence depends upon winning that war."[63] For Barnston, and for his devoted supporters at Beth Israel, Zionism was practically treason especially in a time of war, or at least might look like it to gentiles, and Jews should rather expend their efforts on demonstrating their loyalty as Americans. Other Houston Jews may have shared Barnston's concern about appearing divided in their national loyalty. Diane Ravitch, an historian of American education, grew up in Houston in the 1940s and 1950s before moving to New York for college and, eventually, a professorship at Columbia University. Her fellow Jews in Houston, she remembered, "experienced great insecurity about whether they had dual loyalty. It meant a lot in Texas to be patriotic, and there always seemed to be some doubt about whether Jews were fully committed as Americans. The Houston Jews I knew tried extra hard to show that they were as patriotic as non-Jews."[64]

If Zionism, with its suggestion of Jewish national identity, was a minority view in Houston, it was still a common one which promised to divide the community as a whole. Beth Israel's assistant rabbi, Robert Kahn, received an invitation to the 1942 Atlantic City meeting of the ACJ but refused to attend on the grounds that he was "pro-Zionist," and he wrote to many of the delegates expressing his opposition to their actions. Israel Friedlander later described the "anomalous position" into which Kahn's action had put the congregation: "[I]ts senior rabbi, Dr. Henry Barnston, a life long avowed opponent of Zionism

[63] Henry Barnston to The Convention of American Rabbis (26 May 1942), AJA Manuscript Collection 15.
[64] Diane Ravitch, "The Educational Critic in New York," in Bernard Rosenberg and Ernest Goldstein, eds., *Creators And Disturbers: Reminiscences By Jewish Intellectuals Of New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982): 390.

divide[s] the pulpit with a militant Zionist" who "publicly throughout the country condemn[s] the judgment and the position of the rabbis signing the Atlantic City statement of principles, of which number Dr. Henry Barnston, his senior colleague, was one."[65] Friedlander stopped short of questioning Kahn's patriotism – Kahn was then serving as a U.S. Army Chaplain – but Friedlander's statements, which he made in retrospect, suggest the animosity he and other leaders of Beth Israel developed toward the young rabbi.

The event that triggered the eventual split of Congregation Beth Israel was Rabbi Barnston's announced retirement in May of 1943. Rabbi Kahn, who was then serving in the South Pacific with the understanding that he would return to his duties at Beth Israel when the war was over, was the most likely successor. Clearly, however, Kahn did not suit the ideological demands of the congregation's non-Zionist Board of Trustees: "How better could [the shift to Zionism] be accomplished," Friedlander asked later, "than to replace Dr. Henry Barnston, an uncompromising advocate of Israel's universalistic mission and ever an opponent of political Zionism, with a 'reform' rabbi favoring a Jewish Commonwealth?"[66] The Board made no official mention of Kahn's Zionist views, however, in rejecting him for the position. They expressed a "sympathetic attitude" toward him and emphasized that "there was never the slightest

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[65] Israel Friedlander, "A Chronological Listing of Bibliographical Events and Circumstances Which Led to the Creation by Beth Israel Congregation of a 'Policy Formulation Committee,"" (30 May 1944): 10, AJA Manuscript Collection 132.

[66] Friedlander, "Report of the Policy Formulation Committee," 2. In turning over a cache of records of the Houston Controversy to the AJA, William M. Nathan suggested to Jacob Rader Marcus that the Temple's non-Zionist leadership had deliberately forced Rabbi Barnston into retirement to create an opportunity to replace him with a younger non-Zionist rabbi: his retirement, Nathan wrote, was "a perfect setup for a Reichstag fire in 1943." William M. Nathan to Jacob R. Marcus (13 December 1954), AJA Manuscript Collection 132.

intimation that Rabbi Kahn had failed to serve generally satisfactorily as Assistant Rabbi." However, "Rabbi Kahn was not available," being stationed overseas. Moreover, Kahn had "not acquired the experience necessary to the spiritual leadership of a Congregation as important and as large as Beth Israel." He was "too young to cope with the more mature leadership of the churches of other denominations in this community."[67] Although Kahn had made it clear that he wanted the job, the Board rejected him even before receiving recommendations for other candidates: they considered him patently unsuitable regardless of any other applicants who might be available.

After a brief search, the Board recommended that Beth Israel hire Rabbi Hyman Judah Schachtel of West End Congregation in New York City, just four years older than Kahn and a member of the ACJ. Schachtel, the Board advised, "would guide Beth Israel along accustomed ideological lines and in conformity with the teachings and philosophy of the character subscribed to by Dr. Barnston."[68] While it was important to the Board to preserve the traditions of classical Reform, it was clear when congregants met in August to approve the Board's recommendation that Zionism had become the primary source of contention within the congregation, and that sentiment for or against it had coalesced into support for either Kahn or Schachtel. The meeting erupted into noisy debate, with both sides believing that the approval of a rabbi amounted to a long-term decision about the temple's Zionist policy. "At this momentous meeting," Congregation President Leopold Meyer wrote later, "it became not only

[67] "Members of Congregation Beth Israel" (4 August 1943), AJA Manuscript Collection 132.
[68] Meyer, 19.

apparent but obvious . . . that there were hopelessly irreconcilable factions within our Congregation, and, shockingly, that a small segment of our membership was more devoted to National Zionism than to Judaism." The Zionists in the congregation feared, with justification Meyer said, "that if Rabbi Schachtel were elected, the death knell of National Zionism within Beth Israel would be sounded."[69] Despite the efforts of pro-Zionist (and thus pro-Kahn) participants to turn the meeting to their advantage, they were clearly in the minority, and the assembled congregants voted 346 to 91 to offer the Chief Rabbi position to Schachtel. Participants at the meeting voted as a courtesy to record Schachtel's election as unanimous, but the meeting nevertheless exposed deep divisions within the congregation which would prove impossible to reconcile.

Leopold Meyer expressed outrage after the meeting, not only at the "character of the claptrap" that Rabbi Kahn's supporters had presented but also at "the lengths to which the obstructionists proceeded in their efforts to defeat the constructive purposes of the Board." It was clear to him that "the Zionist ideology was hopelessly incongruous with the temper of Beth Israel as well as incompatible with doctrines and precepts of Reform Judaism as fostered within our Temple."[70] In response, Meyer appointed a Policy Formulation Committee with Israel Friedlander as chair to draft a set of "Basic Principles" for the congregation. To stem the tide of traditionalism and Zionism in their ranks, the committee further recommended that the Temple require applicants for new membership to subscribe to the Principles in order to obtain full membership

[69] Meyer, 22.
[70] Meyer, 23.

privileges: those who refused to sign could join as "Associate" members but would not be eligible to vote in congregational matters.[71]

On September 7, 1943, Friedlander's committee presented a seven-point draft to the Board, which adopted the Principles after some minor discussion and rewording. Following an utterly uncontroversial confirmation in Principle No. 1 of the oneness of God and the responsibility of Jews to "worship and to serve Him," the Principles plunged into the issue of Zionism and Jewish nationalism, clarifying the Board's view that there was no place in their congregation for a philosophy which they believed ran counter to the spirit of Reform Jewish and to American principles:

> We are Jews by virtue of our acceptance of Judaism. We consider ourselves no longer a nation. We are a religious community, and neither pray for nor anticipate a return to Palestine nor a restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state. We stand unequivocally for the separation of Church and State. Our religion is Judaism. Our nation is the United States of America. Our nationality is American. Our flag is the "Stars and Stripes." Our race is Caucasian. With regard to the Jewish settlement in Palestine we consider it our sacred privilege to promote the spiritual, cultural and social welfare of our co-religionists there.[72]

The Basic Principles also reiterated support for a number of elements of classical Reform Judaism. Among other things, they declared that Beth Israel "reject[ed] the religious obligatory nature" of the "rabbinical and Mosaic laws which regulate diet, priestly purity, dress, and similar laws"; provided to itself alone the power to determine the nature of its ritual and ceremonies; recognized "the complete religious equality of woman with man"; and favored the limited use of Hebrew in

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[71] Meyer, 24.

[72] "Basic Principles of Congregation Beth Israel, Houston, Texas. Adopted at a special meeting of the membership of the Congregation, held November 23, 1943," AJA Manuscript Collection 132.

its worship services.[73] Largely a restatement of the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform, the document demonstrated that Beth Israel's leaders were anxious to present themselves to the outside world as patriotic, unequivocal and fully acculturated Americans. While the selection of a new Chief Rabbi had focused on Zionism, the Basic Principles seemed to call into question the choices congregants might make in their own religious practices, apparently barring from full membership Jews who conformed to traditional practices. The Board was, according to Howard Greenstein, "acting vigorously to dissociate itself from any trace of traditionalist influence."[74] The debate at Beth Israel expanded, then, to include not only a conflict over Zionism but also a fundamental disagreement over the freedom of congregants to practice their faith within the Temple according to their own consciences.

Supporters of the Basic Principles, clearly in the majority, also drafted a three-part resolution for members to consider. This statement condemned, each in turn, the three dominant institutions of Reform Judaism in the United States – the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, and the Hebrew Union College (HUC) – for the "growing deviation of organized American Reform Judaism from the ideals and pattern which were established at its founding under the leadership of Isaac M. Wise." Over the previous twenty years, they claimed, changes within Reform had set in motion "forces which do not belong to the new world of emancipation and promise, but which are attuned to and a part of the old world's concept of segregation and

[73] Ibid.
[74] Greenstein, 57.

despair for Jewish life."[75] In defending the fifty-year-old tradition of classical Reform, then, Beth Israel's members claimed to speak for the future, while the "obstructionists" in their congregation were fighting for a vision of Judaism that amounted to obsolete and un-American separatism. These resolutions demonstrated again that Beth Israel felt there was more at stake in this debate than Zionism alone, but more importantly they reflected the willingness of Beth Israel's members to isolate themselves from other Jews in order to avoid isolating themselves from other Americans.

Supporters and opponents of the Basic Principles called for a meeting of the whole congregation to vote on the document and to debate the proposal to use it as a membership requirement. On November 23, some 800 members, a remarkable 50% of the congregation's full voting strength, attended the meeting and cast ballots. In what the *Jewish Herald-Voice* described as an "important and decisive action which is unprecedented in the history of Reform in the United States and unique in the history of Israel," the large gathering discussed, with "decorum and orderliness," the issues before them.[76] Opponents of the measure, labeling themselves "dissenters," expressed concern that Beth Israel was neglecting the true historical mission of Reform Judaism – to change with changing times and to accept differences of opinion tolerantly. "I have no quarrel with the political Zionists though I do not accept their views," said William

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[75] "Resolution Adopted by the Members of Hebrew Congregation Beth Israel of Houston, Texas (An American Reform Congregation) at a Special Meeting of the Congregation Held on November 23, 1943," appended to letter from Leopold L. Meyer, President of Congregation Beth Israel, to Adolph Rosenberg, President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (12 January 1944), AJA Manuscript Collection 132.

[76] "Beth Israel Adopts Basic Principles; Membership Votes For 612 To 168," *Jewish Herald-Voice* (25 November 1943).

Nathan, a former Temple trustee, "[and] I say without fear of contradiction that I shall not quarrel with the views entertained by any Jew." Nathan expressed astonishment, therefore, that the Board would seek "to impose upon any member of this Congregation whatever be his beliefs the set and frozen norm of an inelastic credo." Judaism, he continued, "has been amended time and time, and is in a constant state of flux and change. Its eternal quality is dynamic rather than static. . . . Our prophets and our seers have taught that each generation raises up its own saviors, and solves in its own way its own problems." Finally, Nathan suggested a connection to Nazism, pointing out that the Board's plan "bears all the earmarks of 'Made in Germany,'" despite its supporters' proclaimed Americanism.[77]

Israel Friedlander, speaking for the supporters of the Board's action, claimed that the Principles were "the only course open to Reform if it was to be maintained as a Reform movement," and read testimonials from Reform rabbis in support of the Principles. The CCAR and the UAHC were, he claimed, moving in a direction that was antithetical to the true principles of Reform Judaism, and the Basic Principles were necessary to counter that movement. He read from a *Time* magazine article describing the process for procuring kosher food for Jewish soldiers and expressed concern that gentiles would note (and perhaps resent) such Jewish differences: the Principles, he said, clarified the fact that Reform Jews did not accept the dietary laws.[78] David White, editor of the *Jewish Herald-Voice*,

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[77] William M. Nathan, "Mr. President and Members of Beth Israel" (23 November 1943), AJA Manuscript Collection 132.

[78] Friedlander's comments are paraphrased in "Beth Israel Adopts Basic Principles; Membership Votes For 612 To 168," *Jewish Herald-Voice* (25 November 1943).

responded for the dissenters by condemning the restriction against *kashrut* in the Principles as pandering to gentiles, "merely an attempt to show the Christian world that we do not observe the dietary laws" rather than a genuine statement of principle. He warned that the Nazis did not distinguish between kosher and non-kosher Jews, and similarly it was of little avail for Beth Israel to make such a distinction.[79]

When discussion was concluded, the membership voted 632 to 168 to support the Basic Principles and then, "in the record time of seven minutes," passed the resolutions condemning the UAHC, CCAR and HUC. [80] This outcome was disastrous for the congregation. In April of 1944, from his post in the South Pacific, Rabbi Kahn submitted his resignation to Beth Israel, citing not so much his opposition to the Principles themselves, which he characterized as "a rather poorly written hodge-podge of theology, anti-defamation, anti-Zionism, and anti-Orthodoxy," but the requirement that they be "the sine quo non for voting membership in a Jewish religious community."[81] Within two months, more than 200 dissatisfied members of Beth Israel left the congregation to form Temple Emanu El, and they invited Rabbi Kahn to serve as head rabbi upon his return from military service. The charter of the new congregation clearly articulated its origin in the division of the older temple: "Judaism is a religion of perpetual growth and development," it read, and "the power of the synagogue for good

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[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Robert Kahn to Board Members of Congregation Beth Israel (1 March 1944), AJA Manuscript Collection 132. The *Jewish Herald-Voice* reprinted Kahn's letter in its entirety as "Chaplain Robt. I. Kahn Tenders His Resignation to Temple Beth Israel," *Jewish Herald-Voice* (13 April 1944).

depends, in part, upon the inherent right to freedom of thought and speech of both its members and its pulpit."[82]

Beth Israel also suffered in national reputation, becoming a conspicuous target for Jewish commentators across the country: with the exception of a few scattered supporters, mostly members of the ACJ, condemnation was widespread. "I need hardly tell you that nationally the Houston congregation has received a terrible black eye," wrote Rabbi Abram Goodman to William Nathan. "Everybody is talking about their action in offending Jews who were not of the same opinion."[83] In an exaggerated illustration of the intense anger Beth Israel's action inspired, the American Jewish Congress accused Beth Israel of composing "a set of 'Nuremberg laws'" that threatened the free practice of Judaism, an expression that *Time* magazine reprinted for national consumption.[84] Solomon Freehof, president of the CCAR, argued that in spite of its best efforts Beth Israel had in fact deviated from the fundamental principles of Reform Judaism: "It is only an Orthodoxy which dares not depart from 'classic' patterns laid down by past generations," he wrote in a response to the congregation. "But Reform Judaism is a liberal Judaism. It proclaims the right of each generation to change customs and rituals and even to restate doctrines, provided the essential principles of Judaism are preserved and strengthened by such changes."[85] Rabbi Stephen

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[82] *Congregation Emanu El, Houston, Texas: The First Fifty Years, An Adventure of the Spirit, 1944-1994* (Houston, 1994).

[83] Rabbi Abram V. Goodman to William Nathan (13 December 1943) AJA Manuscript Collection 132.

[84] "Judaism in Houston, Texas," *Congress Weekly* (19 November 1943), included in Friedlander, "Report of the Policy Formulation Committee," Exhibit 2-E; "Storm Over Zion," *Time* (17 January 1944): 38.

[85] Solomon Freehof to Leopold Meyer [15 March 1944], included in Friedlander, "Report of the Policy Formulation Committee," Exhibit 2-X.

Wise claimed that the Basic Principles "virtually affirmed the second-rate Americanism of those of its members who observe the dietary laws and hold membership in a Zionist organization." In reducing non-supporters to non-voting status, Wise wrote, "the Jewish Grand Inquisition of Houston" had committed an "evil and self-damning deed" that was an expression of "their unwisdom and bigotry." The members who supported the condemnation of the leading institutions of Reform Judaism seemed "to glory in the shame of this new and loathsome brand of cowardly anti-Jewishness." Wise called on the UAHC to discontinue Beth Israel's membership in the Union if it did not rescind "its shameful impeachment of Jewish traditionalism as un-American."[86]

The UAHC took no action, though a flurry of reproachful letters flew back and forth between Houston and the headquarters of the national institutions Beth Israel indicted; soon the furor died. The Basic Principles, however, including the requirement that new members endorse them, remained official policy at Beth Israel until 1968, when Rabbi Schachtel wrote to Jacob Rader Marcus that "[w]hile these principles have de facto been forgotten for many years," they finally "were eliminated and revoked without a dissenting voice" at an annual meeting of the congregation.[87] But while the furor lasted, it exposed a number of ironies at the heart of Jewish life in Texas. Beth Israel's members had long existed on the frontier of American Jewry, but when they finally sought to define themselves as defenders of core Jewish values, they showed themselves to be still

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[86] Stephen Wise, "The Shame of Houston," *Opinion: a Journal of Jewish Life and Letters* (February 1944): 5.
[87] Hyman Judah Schachtel to Jacob R. Marcus (9 December 1968), AJA Manuscript Collection 132.

on the fringe of American Jewish life – paradoxically viewing other American Jews as their opponents. In an attempt to defend the liberal mission of Reform Judaism, its suitability to the acculturated lives of American Jews, Beth Israel created a new kind of orthodoxy; in its attempt to defend American values, it produced a fundamentally exclusionary and anti-democratic document. Conditions around the world were rapidly changing; American Jewry was changing; but Houston Jews failed to keep up. The center had moved toward them, and they had fled from it, preferring to remain remote, isolated, and righteously indignant.

Chapter 7. Texas Jews Respond to the World Crises of the 1940s

Despite moments of intense reaction like the Houston Controversy, which suggested that Texas Jews were uninterested in the changing tides of Jewish life around the world, they could not escape global events of the 1940s that had a profound effect on Jewish people everywhere: the Holocaust, World War II, and the establishment of Israel. As these developments unfolded, Texas Jews, in the words of journalist David Ritz, "[had] to come to terms with themselves not as provincial Jews, but as universal Jews."[1] Even as the influx of more traditionally religious people was changing their home communities, native Texas Jews were themselves changing, adapting to a new sense of solidarity with Jews around the world. This process unified diverse communities which, in the face of global crises, were more prone to gloss over differences among themselves than they had ever been. Irving Goldberg of Dallas, for example, noticed "an affirmative alliance between all Jews" in his city, an "admixture of the old and new, harmoniously harnessed, [which] did an effective job in the crises of our times."[2] To be sure, the Houston Controversy occurred in 1943 in the midst of these global crises, but the activities of Jewish Texans across the state in the 1940s indicate that the conflict at Beth Israel was atypical, a symbol of how much had changed. The elders of Beth Israel fumed and fussed, but it was clear as the critical decade wore on that the ideology they represented, at odds with the leaders of American

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[1] David Ritz, "Inside the Jewish Establishment," *D, The Magazine of Dallas* 2 (November 1975): 111.

[2] Irving L. Goldberg, "The Changing Jewish Community of Dallas," *American Jewish Archives* 11 (April 1959): 84.

Jewry, was part of the Texas past and no longer consonant with the views of most Jewish Texans.

The Holocaust, the war and the creation of Israel affected Texas Jews directly and personally, drawing them out of the relative isolation that had so long characterized their lives in Texas. They were moved by the increasing hostility toward Jews in Europe to collect funds for their support and to become involved in efforts to bring Holocaust refugees and survivors to safety in Texas. Support for the nation's war effort unified fractious urban Jewish communities, and Texas military bases stationed large numbers of Jewish servicemen from all over the country in small communities that felt obliged to provide them with a Jewish environment. The creation of Israel as a true Jewish geographic and cultural center also provided a new sense of Jewish meaning and identity shared with Jews around the world. Texas was still far from the geographic centers of American and international Jewish life, but the internalized frontiers that had long kept Jewish Texans at a distance from Jews elsewhere were steadily disappearing.

While the Nazis' organized mass murder of European Jews did not begin in earnest until 1942, intimations of what was to come were felt long before, even in frontier communities like Texas. As early as 1928, the *Texas Jewish Herald* in Houston reported on the "Anti Semitic Hooliganism" of German "Hitlerites."[3] In 1930 it printed a story about anti-Semitic propaganda circulating in Germany and later that year published a photograph of Hitler under the heading "Present Day

[3] "The German Police and Anti Semitic Hooliganism in Germany," *Texas Jewish Herald* (25 October 1928).

Anti-Semitism in Europe."[4] Once the Nazis caught the attention of Edgar Goldberg, the *Herald*'s editor (who was no relation to Dallas's Irving Goldberg), he regularly provided news of their activities and their increasing power. The *Herald* had always included national and international Jewish news, especially the gradual development of Jewish institutions in Palestine, but Nazism provided Goldberg with an emotional *cause célèbre* which he exploited fully, both as a matter of conscience and as a way to push newspapers in the dark days of the Great Depression. By the early 1930s, Nazi activities were such a regular fixture in the *Herald* that Goldberg began to receive complaints. "One of my friends says you give too much space to the Nazis – you should lay off them," he wrote in late 1933. "Well I'd like to! But when 600,000 [German] Jews can do nothing but wait the coming of death and when the insidious serpent multiplies in our midst – some one should awaken Jewry."[5]

Goldberg was sensitive to the possibility that the success of Nazism in Germany could give heart to American anti-Semites, and he admonished his readers that they were not as secure as they felt. In a front-page article bearing the dramatic headline "When Hitler's Nazis Come to Houston!" Goldberg presented a strongly worded warning to his readers. He quoted a *Houston Chronicle* article that spoke unspecifically of "organized activities under way [in Texas] to stir hatred of the Jews and to advance Nazi principles." He described an incident the previous week at the city's docks, where Houston police were called

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[4] "Propaganda Warns German Jewry," *Texas Jewish Herald* (3 April 1930); "Present Day Anti-Semitism in Europe," *Texas Jewish Herald* (16 October 1930).
[5] EGO [Edgar Goldberg], "When Hitler's Nazis Come to Houston!" *Texas Jewish Herald* (7 December 1933).

on board a German vessel "when a mutiny threatened after a dispute" regarding "the propriety of the ship's crew marching through Houston downtown streets with a Nazi flag." The police succeeded in preventing the action, but they accepted pro-Hitler pamphlets, printed in English, from the crewmen. Goldberg warned his readers of the outcome if such a demonstration had been permitted to occur:

> Were the Nazis allowed to parade down Main Street, just what do you think would happen?
>
> Well Levy's is the outstanding business institution in the city. Theirs would be subject for first attack!
>
> What would follow? Well Sakowitz Bros. hold an enviable position among the business institutions of Houston, as do Battelstein, Weingarten, Ben Wolfman, Dollarhite-Levy, the Smart Shop, Lechenger, Becker, Gordons Jewelers, would have to pay their toll for being Jews.
>
> Yet who among them in this city is doing anything to fight the anti-Semitic tendency?[6]

Goldberg may have bartered away some of his credibility by suggesting that the best way for these business leaders "to fight the anti-Semitic tendency" in Houston was for each to "subscribe for a hundred copies of the Herald to go to leading non-Jews for propaganda purposes."[7] His warning was vindicated, however, only a few months later, when he reported the founding of a new anti-Semitic journal in Houston, the *Nationalist*, which in its first issue urged its readers to "[p]ut the Jews in their places" and observed that "Germany has shown

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[6] Ibid. Goldberg's passion is evident here, but his editorial eye seems to have taken a holiday. I have changed his use of "their's" to "theirs" in the second paragraph quoted here and his misspelling of "Sackowitz" to "Sakowitz" in the third. I have left intact the awkward sentence in the third paragraph.

[7] Ibid.

the way in persecuting them."[8] Throughout the 1930s, Goldberg and his editorial successor at the *Herald*, David H. White, as well as Jewish editors in Dallas, San Antonio and Fort Worth, printed countless articles and editorials about the Nazis, anti-Semitism in Europe and in the U.S., and American responses to these issues.

As news of the Nazi terror proliferated, the question of providing refuge for the hundreds of thousands of Jews fleeing Central Europe was central to the concerns of American Jews. Historians like David Wyman, Arthur Morse, and Henry Feingold have demonstrated, however, that Americans in general were conspicuously negligent in addressing the Jewish tragedy in Nazi Europe. In *Abandonment of the Jews*, Wyman presents a shocking indictment of the Roosevelt Administration and of the American public for their failure to rise above politics, anti-Semitism, and naïve disbelief to address the crisis adequately. "America, the land of refuge, offered little succor," Wyman writes. "American Christians forgot about the Good Samaritan. Even American Jews lacked the unquenchable sense of urgency the crisis demanded. The Nazis were the murderers, but we were the all too passive accomplices."[9] Between 1933 and 1941, some 112,000 Jews from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia found refuge from the Nazi regime in the United States. As historian Howard M. Sachar points out, however, this figure represents only a fraction of the number that were legally entitled to enter the country under the nation's immigration quota system,

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[8] "New Anti-Semitic Sheet In Houston," *Texas Jewish Herald* (4 January 1934).

[9] David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941-1945* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984): ix. See also David S. Wyman, *Paper Walls: America and the Refugee Crisis, 1938-1941* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1968); Arthur Morse, *While Six Million Died: A Chronicle of American Apathy* (New York: Random House, 1968); and Henry L. Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: the Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945* (New Brunswick, N.J., Rutgers University Press, 1970).

which designated a fixed number of immigrants originating in a particular country who could enter the U.S. in a given year.[10] Similarly, according to Wyman, only 21,000 Jewish refugees entered the U.S. during the years of World War II, some 10% of the number that could have been admitted under the existing quotas.[11]

The reasons for this failure are complex and well-documented. At the heart of the problem was a fundamental anti-immigration sentiment among Americans, including many in the government, that overwhelmed whatever compassion they may have felt for Hitler's victims. In the midst of the Depression, Americans were not prepared to accept – and Roosevelt was not willing to force them to accept – countless displaced, impoverished immigrants who might compete with them for scarce jobs and public assistance. "Minimal as immigration was from Germany," Howard Sachar explains, "the restrictionists now could fortify their case by arguing that every refugee entering the United States was putting an American out of work."[12] The fact that the refugees most in need of rescue were Jews did not, sadly, help their case. By 1940, the American Jewish Committee determined that anti-Semitism in America had reached an unprecedented degree: nearly half of those responding to a poll agreed that Jews

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[10] Howard M. Sachar, *A History of the Jews in America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992): 485.
[11] Wyman, x.
[12] Sachar, 477-78. In general, the charge was untrue. The Central European Jews who arrived in the U.S. were disproportionately well-educated professionals rather than working-class laborers who, in fact, contributed greatly to American society in specialized fields like medicine, law, science, and the arts. Sachar reports that more than half of the adult Jews who arrived in the U.S. from Germany had completed a gymnasium (high school) education, and 20% had attended universities or polytechnical institutes. "The National Refugee Service," he writes, "listed nine hundred lawyers among those arriving between 1934 and 1944, as well as two thousand physicians, fifteen hundred writers, fifteen hundred musicians, and no fewer than three thousand academicians." Sachar, 496. Such a charge also does not explain why the Congress rejected a 1939 bill that would have brought 10,000 refugee children into the country.

already exercised "too much power" in the country and should not be allowed to augment their numbers.[13] Anti-Jewish commentators like Father Charles E. Coughlin, whose syndicated radio program reached millions of Americans, linked Jews, paradoxically, with both the threat of "Communist revolution" and a conspiracy of "international bankers" and "Shylocks" intent on monopolizing the global economy. By 1933, Coughlin was regularly drawing 30-40% of the listening audience, making him one of the most popular personalities on the air.[14]

While no evidence suggests that anti-Semitic and anti-immigrant sentiment was stronger in Texas than elsewhere in the nation, there is certainly no reason to suspect that it was weaker. Texas congressmen, in fact, were among the staunchest advocates of restrictionist immigration policies that prevented more Jewish refugees from finding safety in the United States, and anti-Semitic attitudes may have lurked beneath their refusal to open America's doors wider for the victims of Nazi persecution. In 1931, eleven out of seventeen Texas congressmen voted in support of a proposal to halt immigration into the U.S. altogether for a period of two years, with a single exception for relatives of immigrants already in the country.[15] While the bill was ultimately defeated, its support in the Texas delegation demonstrated their restrictionist leanings.

The most prominent restrictionist in the Texas congressional delegation was Martin Dies, Jr. of Beaumont, one of the most vocal conservatives in

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[13] Sachar, 478.
[14] Sachar, 453.
[15] Kathryn Diane Cain, "'In Your Own State, In Your Own Community': Jewish and Non-Jewish Texans' Reactions to the Early Days of the Holocaust, 1933-1939" (Master's Thesis, Southwest Texas State University, 1998): 53.

Congress and the first chairman of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). During his fourteen years in Congress, from 1930 to 1944, Dies was a passionate opponent of the New Deal, labor unions and immigration, and he argued consistently for an isolationist approach to foreign affairs. "If the majority of the German people want Adolph Hitler," Dies proclaimed on the House floor in December of 1931, "it is none of our business, and we should be content to administer our own affairs without interfering with those of other countries."[16] Two years later, in the course of a House debate on revising the Immigration Act of 1924, Dies expressed his view on immigration restriction in no uncertain terms: "We must ignore the tears of sobbing sentimentalists and internationalists, and we must permanently close, lock and bar the gates of our country to new immigration waves and then throw the keys out."[17] In 1936, Dies condemned immigrants already in the country for sending money earned in America to their families overseas and for holding jobs which "rightfully belonged" to Americans. Tying immigration to the political radicalism of which he was a sworn enemy, he declared that immigrants were "the backbone of communism and fascism," bringing alien standards into the country and forcing the U.S. into involvement in European affairs.[18] While Dies himself apparently never condemned Jews overtly, an anti-Semitic argument was implicit in his condemnation of immigration in general and of political radicalism. In the course of the HUAC hearings over which he presided, moreover, he let others do such talking for him,

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[16] *Congressional Record* (18 December 1931): 845-847, quoted in Cain, 56.
[17] Quoted in Morse, 145.
[18] *Congressional Record* (10 March 1936): 1367-68, quoted in Cain, 57.

"luxuriating," writes Howard Sachar, "in the parade of Jewish writers, directors, and actors whose loyalty was called into question." Chairman Dies permitted "fringe rightists . . . to engage in long Jew-baiting polemics" as part of their House testimony.[19] Dies represented an especially conservative district for seven terms, but his defeated 1941 and 1957 attempts to win a seat in the U.S. Senate indicate that his isolationist views were not shared by the majority of Texas voters statewide. Still, his visible presence in Congress and the national attention he received could not have given heart to Jewish Texans hopeful that their government would recognize the urgency of the European situation.

In the midst of this climate of increasing anti-Semitism, Edgar Goldberg expressed justified concern that Jews by themselves lacked the ability to protect their own interests. If any meaningful action was to occur in the U.S. or in Europe to counteract anti-Semitism and to pave a way for refugees, he believed, gentiles would have to be moved to participate. "The Herald telling it to the Jews," Goldberg observed, "is not reaching the non-Jew, whom we ought to reach." The editor distributed copies of the *Herald* free to public libraries in the state, along with copies of the *American Hebrew*, "the outstanding exponent of Jewry in America today," which ran a "heroic expose of Nazi-ism." [20] Rabbi Henry Cohen's wife, Mollie Cohen, expressed similar frustration when a gentile acquaintance stopped by the couple's home to "commiserate with them on the fate of their coreligionists." As the friend expressed his concern, Mrs. Cohen "turned

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[19] Sachar, 456.

[20] EGO [Edgar Goldberg], "When Hitler's Nazis Come to Houston!"

on him and said, 'Yes, it is too bad. Why don't you Christians do something about it?'"[21]

Such remarks demonstrate Jews' fear that their gentile neighbors remained unmoved by the urgency of the situation. Indeed, while gentile Texans "neither understood nor approved Hitler's bloody rancor against the Jews," as Texas historian T.R. Fehrenbach has observed, the "specter of Jewish genocide, which haunted many other people, never impinged strongly on the Texan mind. It had not much more relevance to Texas society than the once-famed Armenian massacres by the Turks."[22] Part of Fehrenbach's explanation for their ignorance is that so few gentile Texans had regular contact with Jews or thought of them at all. Despite a sharp population growth in the 1920s and 30s, Jews remained a tiny fraction of the state's population, never more than 1%, so their presence was barely felt by most Texans (See Table 7). Moreover, the vast majority of Jews lived in the state's ten largest cities, while most Texans lived in smaller, rural communities where Jews were scarce (See Table 8). It remained possible, therefore, as Fehrenbach has claimed, that "not one Texan in a thousand had ever seen a Jew."[23] Nor could gentile Texans rely on the the press to inform them of European Jews' condition. As Kathryn Diane Cain has shown, mainstream urban newspapers rarely covered issues relating to European Jews, and the rural press ignored them entirely. "It is likely that since small-town newspapers reported

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[21] Anne Nathan and Harry I. Cohen, *The Man Who Stayed In Texas: The Life Of Rabbi Henry Cohen* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1941): 306-307.
[22] T.R. Fehrenbach, *Lone Star: A History Of Texas and the Texans* (New York: Collier Books, 1968): 654-55.
[23] Fehrenbach, 624.

Table 7. Jewish and General Population of U.S., Texas, and Selected Cities, 1920-1960.

Location	Year	Population* Total	Jews	Jews as % of Total
United States	1920	105,273,049	3,602,150	3.42%
	1930	122,288,177	4,228,029	3.46%
	1940	130,962,661	4,770,647	3.64%
	1950	149,877,932	5,000,000	3.34%
	1960	178,554,916	5,531,500	3.10%
Texas	1920	4,663,228	30,839	0.66%
	1930	5,824,715	46,648	0.80%
	1940	6,414,824	49,196	0.77%
	1950	7,711,194	49,196**	0.64%
	1960	9,579,677	60,900	0.64%
Austin (Travis Co.)	1920	57,616	n/a†	n/a
	1930	77,777	n/a	n/a
	1940	111,053	575††	0.52%
	1950	160,980	750	0.47%
	1960	212,136	1,300	0.61%
Beaumont (Jefferson Co.)	1920	73,120	n/a	n/a
	1930	133,391	n/a	n/a
	1940	145,329	1,280	0.88%
	1950	195,083	625	0.32%
	1960	245,659	950	0.39%
Corpus Christi (Nueces Co.)	1920	22,807	n/a	n/a
	1930	51,779	n/a	n/a
	1940	92,661	645	0.70%
	1950	165,471	1,100	0.66%
	1960	221,573	1,300	0.59%
Dallas (Dallas Co.)	1920	210,551	8,000	3.80%
	1930	325,691	8,000	2.46%
	1940	398,564	10,400	2.61%
	1950	614,799	12,000	1.95%
	1960	951,527	17,800	1.87%
El Paso (El Paso Co.)	1920	101,877	1,800	1.77%
	1930	131,597	2,400	1.82%
	1940	131,067	2,250	1.72%
	1950	194,968	2,000	1.03%
	1960	314,070	3,900	1.24%

Table 7. Jewish and General Population of U.S., Texas, and Selected Cities, 1920-1960, cont.

Location	Year	Population		Jews as %
		Total	Jews	of Total
Fort Worth (Tarrant Co.)	1920	152,800	2,250	1.47%
	1930	197,533	2,100	1.06%
	1940	225,521	1,500	0.67%
	1950	361,253	2,000	0.55%
	1960	538,495	2,800	0.52%
Galveston (Galveston Co.)	1920	53,150	1,100	2.07%
	1930	64,401	1,100	1.71%
	1940	81,173	1,200	1.48%
	1950	113,066	1,200	1.06%
	1960	140,364	2,000	1.42%
Houston (Harris Co.)	1920	186,667	5,000	2.68%
	1930	359,328	12,000	3.34%
	1940	528,961	10,000	1.89%
	1950	806,701	14,000	1.74%
	1960	1,243,158	17,000	1.37%
San Antonio (Bexar Co.)	1920	202,096	3,000	1.48%
	1930	292,533	6,000	2.05%
	1940	338,176	6,900	2.04%
	1950	500,460	6,800	1.36%
	1960	687,151	6,100	0.89%
Waco (McLennan Co.)	1920	82,921	1,500	1.81%
	1930	98,682	1,500	1.52%
	1940	101,898	1,150	1.13%
	1950	130,194	1,000	0.77%
	1960	150,091	1,250	0.83%

Sources: For U.S., Texas, and county total populations: U.S. Census as reported in "United States Historical Census Data Browser" <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/census> [Accessed 4 February 2003]; for U.S., Texas, and city Jewish populations: *American Jewish Yearbook*.

[*] General population figures are by county; Jewish population figures are by city. Selected counties are the eight largest by general population as of 1960, plus Galveston (Galveston) and McLennan (Waco) Counties, which had significant Jewish populations. Three of the state's most populous counties – Hidalgo (Edinburg), Lubbock (Lubbock), and Cameron (Brownsville) – are not included because they had negligible Jewish populations or because Jewish population figures are unavailable for the included years.

[**] The *American Jewish Yearbook* did not revise this figure between 1940 and 1956.

[†] 1920 Jewish population figures here and for cities below are estimates for 1918.

[††] 1940 Jewish population figures here and for cities below are estimates for 1944. The fact that many of these figures decline between 1930 and 1944 is probably due to statistical error rather than to an actual decrease in Jewish population, which grew statewide and thus almost certainly also grew in the state's major cities, where Jews generally lived.

little or no international news," Cain writes, "the majority of rural Texans [and thus the majority of Texans] had insufficient access to news of Jewish persecution."[24]

While the general public in Texas, as in the U.S., failed to rally behind the cause of European Jewry, individuals and organizations found ways both inside and outside the bounds of the law to save as many lives as possible: as a result, hundreds of refugees from Hitler's Europe found safety in Texas, though it is impossible to determine their exact number. Because efforts to transport refugees to safety were largely unofficial and occasionally illegal, they are largely undocumented. International organizations like the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), which helped refugees navigate the American immigration

Table 8. Jewish and General Urban Population of Texas, 1920-1960.

	General Population			Jewish Population		
Year	Total	Urban*	% Urban	Total	Urban*	% Urban
1920	4,663,228	1,154,701	24.76%	30,839	22,650	73.45%
1930	5,824,715	1,771,816	30.42%	46,648	33,100	70.96%
1940	6,414,824	2,206,185	34.39%	49,196	35,385	71.93%
1950	7,711,194	3,344,023	43.37%	49,196	41,715	84.79%
1960	9,579,677	4,860,495	50.74%	60,900	54,595	89.65%

Sources: For Texas and county general populations: U.S. Census as reported in "United States Historical Census Data Browser" <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/census> [Accessed 4 February 2003 and 5 February 2003]; for Texas and city Jewish populations: *American Jewish Yearbook.*

* Urban population is determined by totaling the populations of the counties of Bexar (San Antonio), Dallas (Dallas), El Paso (El Paso), Galveston (Galveston), Harris (Houston), Jefferson (Beaumont), McClennan (Waco), Nueces (Corpus Christi), Tarrant (Fort Worth), and Travis (Austin). Population breakdowns for these counties are in Table 7.

[24] Cain, 48.

process, passed them on to family members or to local branches of the Jewish Family Service to see to their adjustment and survival in their new homes; HIAS, therefore, can provide no information on how many refugees settled in any particular place, nor on what happened to the refugees once they left HIAS's care.[25] The National Holocaust Memorial Museum, as well as Holocaust research centers in Dallas and Houston, also have no statistics on pre-war refugees to Texas.[26]

However great their numbers, refugees arriving in Texas found a Jewish community ready to help them and to take a more active role in world Jewish events. In the state's large cities, refugees' needs provided the necessary impetus to achieve a level of community organization that had been impossible before, and communities established city-wide Jewish federations to reach across the barriers between organizations and agencies. The Jewish Community Council of Metropolitan Houston, the Jewish Federation of Social Services in Dallas, the Jewish Federation of San Antonio, and the Jewish Federation of Fort Worth, all in place by the late 1930s, provided assistance to immigrants, facilitated support for the Jewish poor, and organized the collection of funds for refugee relief in

[25] My thanks to Valery Bazarov of HIAS, who spoke to me at length about the difficulty in recovering statistics on Jewish refugees in the 1930s and 1940s: despite coming up empty, he provided a number of valuable leads.

[26] I corresponded, for example, with Barbara Fagin of the Dallas Holocaust Memorial Center and Martin Goldman of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., neither of whom could provide figures on refugees to Texas. "There is no way for sure to know when they came, if [Texas] was the first place they went to, etc.," Mr. Goldman wrote in an e-mail. He was able to tell me that there are more than 900 Holocaust survivors currently living in Texas, but it is, of course, impossible to derive from that figure any estimate of how many arrived in the state in any particular era. Leslie Wagner of the Dallas Jewish Historical Society uncovered some materials relating to Jewish survivors arriving in Dallas after the war but could not locate statistics on pre-war refugees.

Europe.[27] Irving Goldberg of Dallas made explicit the connection between Hitler's rise in Germany and the effort to coordinate Dallas's Jewish organizations, noting that the Dallas Federation united the city's native Reform Jewish residents with more traditional newcomers from other cities. "Hitler convulsed the world Jewish community," he wrote, and the response of Jewish Dallasites "called for an affirmative alliance between all Jews, regardless of origin."[28] The Jewish Federations in the large cities also contributed money to national organizations such as the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith that combated anti-Semitic speech and activity.[29]

Anecdotal evidence also suggests the outlines of a heroic, if spontaneous and disorganized, program of rescue in which Texas Jews and non-Jews cooperated to facilitate the transport and entry into Texas of hundreds of Central European Jewish refugees. One of the most compelling cases, described by its participants as "Operation Texas," centered around Austin's young congressman, Lyndon B. Johnson. The secret program began in 1938 when Jim Novy, a Jewish Austinite who had amassed great personal wealth after coming to Texas as part of the Galveston Movement, was planning a family vacation to Palestine with stopovers in Germany and Poland to visit relatives. When Johnson, Novy's friend and congressman, heard of his plans, he warned Novy about the changing political situation in Central Europe and urged him to "get as many Jewish people as

[27] Cain, 66.
[28] Irving L. Goldberg, 84.
[29] Cain, 66.

possible out of both countries" because "[t]hey're all going to be killed."[30] Johnson provided Novy with letters and affidavits to fill out on behalf of members of Novy's family in Germany and Poland, forty-two of whom entered the United States using the documents.[31] According to historian James Smallwood, Johnson and Novy then enlarged the scope of the effort:

> Using methods sometimes legal, sometimes illegal, and cash supplied by men like Jim Novy, Johnson smuggled hundreds of Jews into Texas, using Galveston as the entry port. Enough money could buy false passports and fake visas in Cuba, Mexico, and other Latin American countries. After getting to such places, Jews would then make Galveston Island their only port of call.
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> Johnson smuggled boatloads and planeloads of Jews into Texas. He hid them in the Texas National Youth Administration [NYA], a task made easier because LBJ's longtime friend Jesse Kellum was the Texas State Director of the NYA. Although it was illegal to harbor and train noncitizens in the NYA programs, the refugees were nevertheless temporarily housed in various sites scattered across the Lone Star State.
>
> Novy bankrolled the effort, reimbursing the NYA for all expenses, including room and board. He also covered the cost of classes for those who did not speak English and classes to retrain the Jews so that they could meld into American life.[32]

Through such efforts, Smallwood says, "Johnson saved at least four or five hundred Jews, possibly more."[33] Doctoral candidate Louis Gomolak, like Smallwood, examined materials related to "Operation Texas" in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library in Austin and concludes that "there's no

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[30] James M. Smallwood, "Operation Texas: Lyndon B. Johnson's Attempt to Save Jews from the German Nazi Holocaust," <www.texancultures.utsa.edu/hiddenhistory/Pages1/SmallwoodLBJ.htm> [Accessed 3 February 2003]. These quotations come from documents Smallwood examined in his research at the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library in Austin.
[31] Ibid. See also Cain, 60.
[32] Smallwood, "Operation Texas."
[33] Ibid.

question that LBJ was instrumental in helping literally hundreds of Jews get into the U.S., especially through Galveston." Gomolak notes the dearth of clear evidence: for obvious reasons neither Novy nor Johnson documented their illegal activities. He describes, however, a dedication dinner for Austin's Congregation Agudas Achim in late December of 1963, soon after Johnson assumed the presidency, where Novy, with Johnson and many of the Jews he rescued in attendance, told of the actions he and the president had taken thirty years before. Johnson gladly accepted the credit.[34] Lady Bird Johnson later recalled that after the dinner "person after person plucked at my sleeve and said, 'I wouldn't be here today if it weren't for him. He helped get me out.'"[35]

In addition to Novy, a number of other Texas Jews went to great expense and trouble to rescue family members facing persecution in Europe. Nathan Klein of Houston began his rescue efforts in 1934 by signing an affidavit for a relative of his wife who hoped to enter the country as part of that year's quota. The affidavit, which U.S. immigration law required in order for an immigrant to be admitted under the quota, certified that Klein would bear financial responsibility for the woman, assuring that she would not become a burden to the country after her arrival. Following her safe passage to Texas, Klein began receiving requests for similar documents from other family members in Europe, some distantly related, then for friends of family members, then for mere acquaintances. He continued signing affidavits, guaranteeing financial security in

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[34] Louis Stanislaus Gomolak, "Prologue: LBJ's Foreign Affairs Background, 1908-1948" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1989): 49.
[35] Lady Bird Johnson, *A White House Diary*, p. 28, quoted in Smallwood, "Operation Texas."

Texas for any who asked. As a further assurance to federal authorities, Klein often deposited money into bank accounts he opened in the immigrants' names to show that the refugees possessed financial means. Klein eventually made such guarantees for roughly 100 people, most of whom were total strangers to him. "Everyone seemed to have heard about this man in Houston, Texas, signing affidavits," wrote Lorraine Wulfe, a Klein relative who researched his actions on behalf of refugees. "According to his sister Lillian Kaufman, his banker once asked him if he was trying to bring over all the Jews in Europe."[36] Klein was only one of many Houstonians willing to sign such affidavits. Rabbi Robert Kahn recalled an organized campaign in Houston to gather as many affidavits as possible. Kahn signed one himself, then began recruiting others to do so, arguing that if he could afford to do so on his salary, they could too. "I did a minyan," Kahn said, "I did ten. Then I thought I'd done enough. But I realized later that I should have done many more."[37]

A similar effort occurred in El Paso, where Maurice Schwartz, founder of the successful Popular Store, and his brother Nandor brought upwards of 100 family members, mostly nieces and nephews, from Hungary to Texas. Beginning in 1939, with children coming first in small groups, the brothers began arranging transportation for the refugees and navigating the legal requirements of immigration on their behalf. The Schwartzes had family spread throughout Texas already, many of whom took responsibility for new refugees as they arrived.

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[36] Lorraine Wulfe to "Ruthie" (20 September 1994). Thanks to Rabbi Robert I. Kahn for providing a copy of this letter.
[37] Interview with Rabbi Robert I. Kahn (7 October 1995).

When the Hungarian and Czech quotas were filled, the Schwartzes sought ways to bring family through Mexico, a complicated procedure that took a great deal of money and effort to facilitate. To that end, the brothers managed a fund at the Popular Store to which American family members could contribute. Through their efforts, which El Paso rabbi Floyd Fierman meticulously documented, "[t]hese beleaguered people were extricated with great difficulty and, like other relatives before them, were brought into America, housed, educated, given dignity, and absorbed into the work force of the Popular."[38]

As these efforts were underway, Texas Jews still despaired over how little they were able to do. After a 1939 *Reader's Digest* article about Rabbi Henry Cohen appeared in European translations, the rabbi began receiving letters from European Jews asking him to help them leave as he had helped Russian refugees during the Galveston Movement. The letters came in great number "until thirty or forty of them in the morning's mail were not unusual," as the co-authors of Cohen's biography explain. In great detail, frightened writers described the dangers they faced and the circumstances that forced them to flee: "mothers begging him to take their children out of hell; whole families, grown childish in their desperation, asking to be removed bodily to America." Time after time, the rabbi sat down to write, in any one of a multitude of European languages, that there was nothing he could do. "The laws of this country have changed since the days of the Schiff bureau," he explained. "You must wait your turn in the quota." Eventually he was obliged to publish a statement in European newspapers saying

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[38] Floyd S. Fierman, *The Schwartz Family of El Paso: The Story of a Pioneer Jewish Family in the Southwest* (El Paso: University of Texas at El Paso Texas Western Press, 1980): 34.

that he was unable to help, and the flood of letters soon abated. Cohen's inability in the face of American law to help these desperate people remained with the rabbi as one of the great tragedies of his life.[39]

The Holocaust and its reverberations in Texas diminished the conceptual distance between Texas Jews and others Jews: the destruction of European Jewry and the hardships and triumphs of refugees were simply too overwhelming and universal to think of as somebody else's problem. Similarly, World War II presented an immediate and pressing crisis in which Texas Jews, regardless of any sense of remoteness they felt, were compelled to participate. In many ways, World War II provided opportunities for community organizations to expand social action efforts that were already underway. Marguerite Meyer Marks of Dallas, for example, had long been involved in community organization on behalf of a number of non-sectarian causes while remaining an active member of the Dallas chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW). For example, as an NCJW member she was involved in a campaign, for example, to provide free meals to the city's poor children. "It was characteristic of the Jewish women," she wrote, "to see the need and find the way to feed the hungry children of whatever conviction."[40] As a child in Galveston, she had learned from her mother's example "to abandon provincial Sisterhood in order to ally [herself] with a larger National Council of Jewish Women" that pursued projects of national and international scope.[41] As the European situation deteriorated, Marks spoke

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[39] Nathan and Cohen, 316-17.
[40] Marguerite Meyer Marks, "Integration of the Jew and the Non-Jew in Dallas," TJHS Box 3A170, Folder 3.
[41] Marguerite Meyer Marks, "Memoirs of My Family" (1984), TJHS Box 3A166, Folder 6.

publicly on behalf of peace, giving a radio address in 1936 and forming the Texas State Committee on the Cause and Cure of War out of a coalition of organizations that included the Business and Professional Women, the Federated Council of Church Women, the Temple Emanu-El Sisterhood, the NCJW, the American Association of University Women, the PTA, YWCA, and the Women's Christian Temperance Union. In 1941, Marks was asked to join the National Committee on International Relations and Peace, and throughout the war years she organized civil defense activities, promoted the sale of war bonds, and established kindergartens for the children of women working in defense factories.[42]

In all of Texas's large cities, Jews mobilized alongside other Texans to prepare for and support the nation's war effort. Henry Jacobus of Dallas headed the city's USO and fed soldiers at his home. Many Dallasites volunteered with the Red Cross, serving in a variety of capacities: Valerie Aronoff worked in the news office, and Louise Mittenthal, Adlene Nathanson and Olga Mae Schepps drove for the Red Cross Motor Corps Unit, transporting soldiers who arrived at Love Field bound for veterans' hospitals or military bases in the area. Dorothy Lewis had worked for the organization since 1931 caring for World War I veterans, and she again went to work knitting and sewing, preparing surgical dressings and assembling service kits. Members of the Temple Emanu-El Sisterhood, led by Seline Roos, arranged a sewing circle to produce clothing for the Red Cross. The Jewish Community Center hosted dances and set up cots to

[42]Ruthe Winegarten and Cathy Schechter, *Deep in the Heart: the Lives and Legends of Texas Jews* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1990): 153.

accommodate Jewish servicemen on furlough in Dallas; on Saturdays, Rosalee and Bernice Cohn brought the men breakfasts of lox, bagels and cream cheese.[43]

While the Jewish communities of large cities had the means and manpower to contribute directly to the war effort, the conflict reached deeply into rural areas as well. As the nation's defense structure grew during the war, the government built or expanded several military bases in Texas. Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio and Fort Bliss in El Paso, both of which had existed before the war, were upgraded to command headquarters with a greater number of personnel. New installations included Camp Wolters near Mineral Wells, Camp Fannin near Tyler, Camp Howze near Gainesville, Camp Bowie near Brownwood, and Camp Hood near Killeen, all of which opened immediately before or during the course of the war. Randolph Air Field in San Antonio was a major flight instruction facility, and nearby Kelly and Brooks Fields were enlarged; Carswell Field in Fort Worth was the national headquarters of the Air Force Training Command; and the Naval Air Station at Corpus Christi was the nation's largest naval flight-training center. Altogether, more than 1,200,000 troops and some 200,000 airmen trained at these and other facilities.[44]

Of the soldiers, sailors and airmen stationed at Texas bases, thousands were Jewish: in fact, the Jewish military presence around a base often exceeded, sometimes significantly, the Jewish population of nearby towns. "A most happy memory," remembered Evelynn Lois Ray of San Angelo, "was that when World

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[43] Gerry Cristol, *A Light In The Prairie:Temple Emanu-El of Dallas, 1872-1997* (Ft. Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1998): 130-32.

[44] "World War II, Texans In," *The Handbook of Texas Online* <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/WW/qdw2.html> [Accessed 1 July 2002].

War II was being fought, we could at last start dating because we were not allowed to date non-Jews, and the war meant there were Jewish servicemen available for dating."[45] In addition to such benefits, however, the sudden surge in Jewish population posed a challenge to local Jewish communities who felt obliged to provide a sense of Jewish fellowship to the servicemen stationed nearby. Rabbi Sidney Wolf of Corpus Christi, where the expansion of the Naval Air Station roughly doubled the city's population, volunteered to serve the base as an auxiliary chaplain, welcomed Jewish servicemen into his home, and performed weddings for them in his parlor.[46] Lena and Leon Aron served Passover Seder at their home in Nacogdoches for Jewish soldiers and WACS stationed nearby, and their guests enjoyed hearing the familiar prayers recited in a Texas drawl: "It was the unaccustomed accents," remembered Clarice Fortgang Pollard, a WAC from Brooklyn. "Our frankness and [Leon's] responsive wit surrounded us with a feeling of closeness and camaraderie for the rest of the evening."[47]

The Jewish community of Abilene provides a case study in local Jewish responses to the needs of servicemen and women. Camp Barkeley, located eleven miles southwest of town, became one of the state's largest military installations during World War II, serving as headquarters for the 45th Infantry Division and as a POW camp for German prisoners. At its peak it had a total population of

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[45] Evelynn Lois Ray, "Evelynn Lois Ray – San Angelo, Texas," in Howard V. Epstein, *Jews In Small Towns: Legends And Legacies* (Santa Rosa, Calif.: Vision Books International, 1997): 677.
[46] Hollace Ava Weiner, "Rabbi Sidney Wolf: Harmonizing in Texas," in Mark K. Bauman and Berkley Kalin, eds., *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis And Black Civil Rights, 1880s To 1990s* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997): 128.
[47] Clarice Fortgang Pollard, "WAACS in Texas during the Second World War," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 93 (July 1989): 64, quoted in Winegarten and Schechter, 154. I have corrected the spelling of camaraderie from "comradery."

50,000, far exceeding the wartime population of Abilene itself.[48] The Jewish community of Abilene, consisting of thirteen families, found itself host to "hundreds of Jewish boys" and "welcomed them by entertaining at their homes and providing Jewish services at various halls in the town."[49] As the Jewish population of the camp increased, townspeople recognized a need and an opportunity to build a *shul* in Abilene. Committees formed to plan the synagogue and to raise the necessary funds: half the funds came from the small Jewish community, while gentile citizens, believing that all American soldiers should have a place to pray before going overseas, contributed the rest.[50] Abe Levy of nearby Sweetwater, who had brought a Torah from Europe years before for his children to study, donated it to the congregation, and Temple Mizpah was opened in time for High Holiday services in 1942.[51]

The women of the Ladies' Auxiliary of Temple Mizpah were especially valiant in their provision of Jewish social and religious opportunities for soldiers at Camp Barkeley. In September 1942, they served High Holiday meals to approximately 250 soldiers and sponsored suppers every other Sunday for 200 to 400. Mrs. Max Elias, president of the Auxiliary, attended every Jewish wedding at the temple that involved servicepeople, and she and her husband provided

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[48] "Camp Barkeley," *The Handbook of Texas Online* <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/CC/qbc2.html> (Accessed 2 July 2002); "Abilene, Tx.," *The Handbook of Texas Online* <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/ articles/view/AA/hda1.html> [Accessed 2 July 2002].

[49] Mrs. Leonard Goldblatt to unknown addressee (4 February 1946), TJHS Box 3A169, Folder 3.

[50] Mrs. Leonard Goldblatt to unknown addressee (4 February 1946), TJHS Box 3A169, Folder 3; Roy A. Jones II, "Returning respect: Jewish families of Temple Mizpah donate jeweled curtain to MOA [Museums of Abilene]," *Abilene Reporter-News* (7 November 1992).

[51] Suzanne Campbell, interviewed in Brian Cohen, dir., *At Home on the Range: Jewish Life in Texas* (New York: Carousel Film and Video, 1999); *Temple Mizpah: 50 Years Remembered* (1992): 9, TJHS Box 3A174, Folder 2.

surrogate parents for many bridal couples far from home; under Mrs. Elias's leadership the Auxiliary collected a fund to provide wedding feasts for Jewish couples married in the temple. The Auxiliary organized parties for Chanukah and Purim and, most spectacularly, prepared huge Passover Seder meals for hundreds of participants. In 1944, working closely with representatives of the New York-based Jewish Welfare Board, the Auxiliary prepared a complete kosher Seder for more than 1,100 soldiers in a mess hall at Camp Barkeley. "New dishes, new pots and pans were used and the mess hall was completely repainted and cleaned," records the Temple Mizpah memory book. "Kosher food arrived from sources as far away as New York, Chicago and Dallas. Temple Mizpah women's auxiliary was in charge and those few women prepared and served the entire Seder." The women worked for two weeks to prepare 2,500 homemade matzo balls with chicken soup and all the trimmings.[52] "It is hardly believable that so much can be done in so little a community," wrote the parents of a Brooklyn soldier who had attended services at Temple Mizpah, "yet our Jews have always stood out, Thank God."[53]

When the war was over, most of the military bases shrunk or closed – Camp Barkeley was deactivated in 1945 – and the large numbers of soldiers who had temporarily transformed Jewish life in Texas's rural communities disappeared. It was impossible, however, for Texas Jews to return to their previous sense of isolation from world problems. Almost immediately, they

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[52] *Temple Mizpah: 50 Years Remembered*, 12-13.
[53] Mr. and Mrs. M. Lustberg to Temple Mizpah (6 October 1943) in *Temple Mizpah: 50 Years Remembered*, 14.

stepped in to ease the arrival of Jewish "displaced persons," including many survivors of the concentration camps who sought refuge in Texas. Between 1945 and 1951, the U.S. took in about 350,000 European Jews, who settled in communities across the country.[54] As with pre-war refugees, it is impossible to determine the number of survivors who settled in Texas, but many examples exist of Texas Jews and gentiles reaching out to help them. In 1946, Rabbi Sidney Wolf of Corpus Christi organized a banquet to raise money for displaced Jews in Europe, and he invited the city's mayor, Robert Wilson, to address the crowd. "[I]n a subdued and moving voice," Wolf remembered, the mayor "pledged $5,000 in memory of his beloved son who had lost his life on the battlefields of Europe . . . whereupon it seemed as if the whole crowd rose en masse to its feet to follow the Mayor's example." The banquet raised more than $125,000.[55] Placing refugees in Texas communities required collecting affidavits to certify that new arrivals would not become public charges, and many Texas individuals and organizations, as they had done for refugees before the war, provided them in quantity: by one account, the Weingarten grocery store chain alone made 1,000 affidavits available to the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.[56]

National organizations such as the United Service for New Americans asked local communities to assume support of refugees, and Texas communities accepted that responsibility. In 1950, for example, the Jewish Family Service and

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[54] Leonard Dinnerstein, *America and the Survivors of the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982): 283-84.
[55] Quoted in Weiner, "Rabbi Sidney Wolf: Harmonizing in Texas," 128.
[56] Ruthe Winegarten, notes from interview with Eva Silberman (May 1988), TJHS Box 3A169, Folder 6; Winegarten and Schechter, 212.

the Jewish Welfare Federation of Dallas met to discuss ways of integrating an additional ninety-six refugee families into their community.[57] Two years later, the same group issued a plea to the public to help the "New Americans" among them. "109 families have already been settled in Dallas," a pamphlet read. "25 more will come in 1952 . . . .Fresh dollars are needed to start new lives for them." The pamphlet listed the Dallas Refugee Service Program as one organization that had benefited from the previous year's fundraising campaign.[58] In Laredo, local Jews were enlisted to facilitate the entry of immigrants across the Mexican border. "Whenever these people came to Laredo and asked for Jewish help, they were always referred to me," recalled Albert Granoff, who operated a retail establishment that conducted business on both sides of the border. Representatives of the New York Association for New Americans, affiliated with the United Jewish Appeal, asked Granoff to look after immigrants passing through Laredo and to help them solve whatever immigration, transportation, or personal problems they had. "They gave me permission to spend as much money as I needed in order to help these people," Granoff wrote in his memoirs. "All I had to do was to present them with a bill at the end of the month and it was paid without question." He was able to help many of them, "and those whose problem could not be solved, I sent back to New York, where the UJA helped them." In several cases, Granoff was enlisted to help Jews who were moving in the other

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[57] Irving L. Goldberg and Mrs. Jack Woolf to Boards of Directors, Jewish Welfare Federation and Jewish Family Service (13 June 1950), Levi Olan Papers, AJA Manuscript Collection 181.
[58] "Channel Your Giving Along These Lines" (1952), Records of the Jewish Federation of Greater Dallas, Dallas Jewish Historical Society Archives. My thanks to Leslie Wagner of the Dallas Jewish Historical Society for locating this document for me.

direction, passing through Laredo to join family in Mexico. In later years, Granoff remembered these activities as "a profound and enriching satisfaction."[59]

For many Holocaust survivors seeking refuge in the United States, Texas seemed a remote and unfamiliar destination. Some viewed this as an advantage. Sam Silberman, awaiting transport from a displaced persons camp in Europe, specifically requested to live in Texas: he had heard of it and thought it was still a frontier with plenty of opportunity.[60] For others, however, Texas seemed a lonesome and forbidding prospect. Arnold and Rebecca Spanner, Auschwitz survivors who had met and married in a displaced persons camp in Germany, were immediately concerned about being relocated to Corpus Christi, Texas, a place neither of them had ever heard of. They were both from large cities – she from Lodz, Poland, and he from Berlin – and both had lost their entire families in the concentration camps. They worried about living in a place so strange and far away, a town which they could not locate on most maps of the United States. After arriving in Corpus Christi, they were further disappointed to find that their final destination was actually McAllen, an even smaller and more remote community in the Rio Grande Valley near the Mexican border. They learned later that the small Jewish community in McAllen had specified to relocation authorities the kind of refugees they believed would be best able to adapt to life in the town. "[I]t required one young couple, not rigidly orthodox," writes Dorothy Rabinowitz, who interviewed Rebecca Spanner in the 1970s, "who could therefore probably adjust to a place that was not, after all, one of the centers of

[59] Albert L. Granoff, "To America with Love," 179, AJA Small Collection 4215.
[60] Ruthe Winegarten, notes from interview with Eva Silberman.

Jewish life in America, a town where kosher food was not available around the block." McAllen had chosen the Spanners, Rabinowitz explains, "and there, whether they wished to go or not, they went."[61]

During the long drive from Corpus Christi to McAllen, the Spanners sat in the back seat of the car while their hosts maintained a near total silence in the front seat, unable to communicate effectively in Yiddish or Polish. It was after eleven o'clock at night when they arrived:

> In wintertime, McAllen's houses darkened early; furthermore, they looked to the couple as though they had no one living in them. No chink of light was visible; no sound came from them. Where were they being taken, Rebecca had asked her husband in a whisper. "A *dorf* [a very small village, a backwater]" she answered herself, having received no reply from her husband, who was busy staring into the darkness, looking for clues in the outsides of the few shuttered houses they passed. "A *dorf*," she maintained again, whereupon her husband turned and whispered in Polish not to worry, no one would force them to stay if it didn't work out for them here.[62]

Rebecca had been prepared to settle anywhere in America, "but now that the time had come, her heart sank to see how tiny and remote a place they were to live in, how far from cities and people." She had grown up in the second largest city in Poland and "had all along seen herself coming to a city or, at the least, a large town."[63]

On arriving in McAllen, however, the Spanners were touched by the generosity of its sixty or so Jewish families, who provided a five-bedroom home for them to live in, much more space than they would have had if they had settled

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[61] Dorothy Rabinowitz, *New Lives: Survivors of the Holocaust Living in America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977): 114.
[62] Rabinowitz, 115-116.
[63] Rabinowitz, 116.

in a larger community. The Jewish Community Service paid the rent on the house and covered the couple's medical costs, and McAllen's Jews provided so much in the way of food, clothing, and other necessities that Rebecca was embarrassed to accept it. Rebecca befriended an older woman whom she came to address as "Aunt Sarah," "a Texas born and bred local schoolteacher, whose Yiddish was fluent and impeccable," who coached Rebecca tirelessly in English. Sarah comforted Rebecca in her "pure, almost literary kind" of Yiddish, "which she had learned from her parents and somehow managed to preserve, though there had not been anyone to speak Yiddish with in McAllen for many years," telling the young refugee that "since the people in McAllen spoke only one language and she, Rebecca, spoke three – none of which was English, it so happened – that it was not she but the other people who should be feeling self-conscious."[64] When, several years later, the Spanners were obliged to move to Houston, Rebecca was sorry to leave McAllen, but in Houston she was able to play the same role for new refugees arriving in the city that McAllen's Jews had played for her.[65]

Mike Jacobs, another Auschwitz survivor, was relocated to Dallas where he had an adjustment experience that differed greatly from Rebecca Spanner's, though he had similar doubts about Texas's remoteness. Jacobs had spent two years in the Auschwitz and Mauthausen concentration camps and survived a five-day death march in freezing weather. During the course of the war he lost his entire immediate family – both parents and five siblings – as well as more than eighty extended family members. He remained in Germany for six years after the

[64] Rabinowitz, 118-119.
[65] Rabinowitz, 124.

war, teaching athletics and running a small shop. In 1951, the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and HIAS helped him move to Dallas. When he applied for the required papers to emigrate to the U.S., the American official he spoke with told him that he should avoid New York, where there were few openings for teachers, and look instead to Texas. "In New York there is a big forest of trees," the official explained. "If you were to go and be in the middle of the forest, you would get lost and not know how to get out. I'm talking about people." When Jacobs looked blank, the official laughed and told him that he was going instead "to the biggest state in the United States." Jacobs remained dubious: "I still had no idea what he was talking about," he later remembered, "but I guessed it was okay."[66] When Jacobs told his friends that he was going to Dallas rather than to New York, they offered only discouragement:

> They looked at me. "Mendel, you are crazy! Why are you going to Dallas? Why not New York, Baltimore, Chicago, Philadelphia, where more of the displaced people are going? They speak the language you can understand. You are crazy to go to Texas. Don't you watch the movies? No sidewalks, people coming out of beer joints, shooting each other?"[67]

Jacobs brushed off their concerns. "Guys, what are you worried about?" he asked. "When I get to Dallas, Texas, I will buy me a horse and saddle and ride, too."[68]

The JDC arranged his transportation to New Orleans, where representatives of the Jewish community met him at the port; gave him a shower, a meal and fifteen dollars for expenses; and led him to the train. When he arrived

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[66] Mike Jacobs, *Holocaust Survivor: Mike Jacobs' Triumph Over Tragedy, a Memoir*, ed. Ginger Jacobs (Austin: Eakin Press, 2001): 132-33.
[67] Jacobs, 133.
[68] Ibid.

in Dallas, Harry and Chaya Andres, who spoke fluent Yiddish, met him at the station and took him to a boarding house in a South Dallas neighborhood with a large Jewish population. The Jewish Family Service of Dallas provided $125.00 for his first month's rent and expenses. "I did not feel comfortable getting an allowance," Jacobs wrote later, "so that was the last time I received money from the Jewish Family Service."[69] Instead, he worked briefly as a landscaper, a skill he had learned at a Nazi work camp. During his years in Dallas, Jacobs organized and coached youth soccer leagues and opened a scrap metal business with his wife Ginger in 1954. In an English-language class at SMU, Jacobs, required to give a five-minute extemporaneous speech on "something you know about," spoke for an hour about the Holocaust, prompting classmates to invite him to speak about his experiences at their church. He continued making regular speaking engagements afterwards. "I promised [in the camps] I would go and talk about the Holocaust to as many people as possible. . . . Since then, I have never stopped speaking and bringing the message of what one human can do to the other when we are silent and complacent." Since that first speech, Jacobs has addressed "schools, universities, community colleges, churches, synagogues, eating-disorder groups, therapists, and people at risk."[70]

Jacobs's efforts at public education led him to spearhead the creation of the Dallas Holocaust Memorial Center, which opened in 1984. "It had been a long dream of mine to have a place where we Holocaust Survivors could gather and memorialize our loved ones," he explains in his memoirs. "As I developed

[69] Jacobs, 137.
[70] Jacobs, 141-42.

my idea, I decided that we should build a memorial center for Holocaust studies, which would include a memorial room wherein we could have memorial stones on the wall."[71] The Jewish Community Center provided space for the facility. Jacobs convinced other survivors in the community that the plan was worthwhile, and they began raising funds and selecting architects. As the *coup de grace*, Jacobs went to extreme effort to locate a European boxcar that had been used for the transport of Jewish prisoners to concentration camps and to arrange its shipment to Dallas to stand as a permanent exhibit at the Center. The Center served as a model for similar facilities in Houston and El Paso, as well as in other communities around the United States.[72]

Mike Jacobs also served as area chairman for Israel Bonds, and the Zionist Organization of America once named him Man of the Year.[73] Active Zionism is not surprising in a person whose Holocaust experience so shaped his life and character. The destruction of European Jewry underlay the establishment of Israel, and the memory of the Holocaust inspired much of the support that Israel received in its early years from Jews and gentiles around the world. As the Holocaust and World War II unfolded, then, Texas Jews underwent a gradual but definite change in their feelings toward Zionism. Traditionally, Jewish Texans were acculturationists who had long and consistently opposed the notion of a Jewish state with its suggestion of a separate, distinct Jewish nationhood. But as

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[71] Jacobs, 144.
[72] See, for example, Waveney Ann Moore, "From Despair, Hope: Building on an Idea," *St. Petersburg Times* (15 February 1998) on the creation of the Tampa Bay Holocaust Memorial Museum and Educational Center.
[73] Winegarten and Schechter, 161.

the Houston Controversy demonstrated in 1943, Texas Jewry had strong and growing undercurrents of sympathy for a Jewish Palestine that echoed feelings around the world.

As the reality of Israeli independence grew nearer, Texas rabbis urged their congregations to take a less provincial view of Jewish affairs and to involve themselves in Israeli development. By bending with the times and pushing their congregations to do the same, these rabbis helped to prevent confrontations like the one that tore Beth Israel apart in 1943. David Lefkowitz of Dallas's Temple Emanu-El, for example, had long been opposed to the idea of a Jewish state and had expressed support for the views of the anti-Zionist American Council of Judaism. But whereas the leaders of Beth Israel had taken an unwavering anti-Zionist stand, Lefkowitz's view was more nuanced, more sensitive to the various inflections of opinion within his congregation: "A Jewish congregation," he wrote to his son-in-law, the banker Fred Florence, "should neither come out for or against Zionism, but rather for Judaism, which is the uniting principle of all congregations."[74] After the creation of Israel in 1948, the Jewish Welfare Federation of Dallas, which had long raised funds for the United Jewish Appeal and other Jewish causes, met to plan a fundraising drive for the new nation. One participant took a traditional isolationist stance, arguing that Dallas Jews preferred to keep their money in Dallas; Lefkowitz spoke up, however, in favor of the United Jewish Appeal and insisted that the drive should continue.[75]

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[74] David Lefkowitz to Fred Florence (11 April 1945), quoted in Cristol, 140.
[75] Cristol, 140.

Similarly, Rabbi Samuel Rosinger of Beaumont pushed his congregation toward active Zionism, even when they put up resistance, and he helped to promote Jewish activity in a broader sense than prevailed in his otherwise acculturationist and politically conservative congregation. Rosinger had long sympathized with the Zionist movement – Henrietta Szold, the founder of Hadassah, was his classmate at the Jewish Theological Seminary – and he encouraged his congregants to form Zionist organizations. When Szold visited "wild and wooly Texas" in 1912, Rosinger supported her efforts to establish Hadassah chapters in the state, even though he felt that "with her modesty, simplicity, and naturalness, she was not cut out for propaganda work . . . especially in this borderland of civilization." Her tour, however, "was a success of the most enduring kind," and she organized chapters in many Texas towns, including Beaumont, which, Rosinger remarked, "have made vital contributions to the work of healing and redemption to which she dedicated her life."[76] In the late 1940s, Rosinger visited Israel and met Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, to whom he bragged that "[w]hen I came to my congregation, they were anti-Zionists, but I converted them to Zionism." Ben-Gurion replied that this was "only the beginning of the task incumbent upon you. When you return home, you have to convert them to be Israelis."[77]

Despite such efforts, anti-Zionism remained a powerful undercurrent in Texas Jewish communities, even after the existence of Israel was an accomplished

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[76] Samuel Rosinger, "Deep in the Heart of Texas," in Stanley F. Chyet, ed., *Lives And Voices: A Collection Of American Jewish Memoirs* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1972): 125-26.
[77] Rosinger, 137-38.

fact. "Probably my most unpleasant experience in my seven years in Fort Worth," wrote Rabbi Milton Rosenbaum, "was having to deal with anti-Zionist Jews." These congregants "saw Zionism as a threat to their acceptance as true Americans," he wrote, "subjecting them to the charge of dual loyalty," and they saw the rabbi's efforts on behalf of Israel "as an attack upon their misconceived 'nativism.'" Even though Rosenbaum was incredulous about an opinion that seemed to him "especially senseless in view of the facts that a great many Jews had already found refuge in Palestine after World War II [and that] in 1948 the State of Israel had come into existence," he tried to understand their feelings. "They were decent people," he wrote. "Some were multi-generational Texans. They were well accepted by their neighbors. Texas was far away from the horrors of Europe. Why did someone have to rock their comfortable boat?"[78] Diane Ravitch, an education scholar who grew up in Houston in the 1940s, noted lingering ambivalence toward Israel in that city as well. While overt anti-Zionism had waned by the 1950s – she only learned years later that her rabbi, Hyman Schachtel, had been a prominent anti-Zionist – pro-Israeli sentiment was not particularly strong either. "I knew next to nothing about Israel," she recalled. "I was aware of its existence, but dimly. There wasn't anything like the intense involvement that one gets growing up in New York. I don't think I ever met anyone, as I was growing up, who had been to Israel or who had any interest in going there."[79] Rabbi Rosenbaum was never able to sway his Beaumont

[78] Milton Rosenbaum, "Remembering Fort Worth," 7, TJHS Box 3A171, Folder 2.
[79] Diane Ravitch, "The Educational Critic in New York," in Bernard Rosenberg and Ernest Goldstein, eds., *Creators And Disturbers: Reminiscences By Jewish Intellectuals Of New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982): 390-91.

congregation entirely toward Zionism, but the "course of events," he claimed, "eventually numbed the fervor of their opposition as history simply passed them by."[80]

Despite such lingering doubt among Texas Jews about the efficacy of a Jewish state, anecdotal evidence attests to the strong support many Jewish Texans felt for the new nation. Walter Cohen, who left his home in Lubbock to fight with the Israeli liberation force, is a rare but compelling example of a Texas Jew who went to extremes in support of the new state. In 1947, Cohen was an American World War II veteran haunted by memories of the war and the Holocaust: "That tragic loss had made a tremendous impact upon me," Cohen wrote, "just one generation removed from Europe. . . . Without question, the Holocaust was probably the most important factor in my decision to become a volunteer in Israel." Reading the *Dallas Morning News*, "with its anti-Zionist persuasion, and all the unfriendly letters-to-the-editor," strengthened his resolve to fight. He consulted Lubbock's rabbi, Joseph Kermin, who had been a member of the Palestinian Jewish Brigade during World War I, and Kermin referred him to appropriate contacts. Cohen offered his service in the Israeli war for independence, emphasizing his experience with anti-tank weapons during World War II, and he received an assignment to fight in an armored brigade in the Galilee. After the war, he traveled back to Israel at least six times.[81]

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[80] Milton Rosenbaum, "Remembering Fort Worth," 7-8.
[81] Walter Cohen, "1948-1949: A Volunteer Looks Back, "1-2, TJHS Box 3A172, Folder 5; "Statement by Walter Cohen," TJHS Box 3A164, Folder 4.

Most Texas Jews, however, limited their pro-Israeli action to advocacy and fundraising, efforts which were often extensive and far-reaching. Herbert Mallinson of Dallas co-chaired the southwestern region of the Joint Distribution Committee and served as Texas State Chairman of the National Refugee Service. After his death in 1941, his sister Reba Wadel took over his campaign, becoming national chairwoman of the Women's Division of the United Jewish Appeal, which collected money for Israeli and American Jews. Jewish newspapers in Texas also promoted fundraising efforts. "This is not just Charity," the *Jewish Herald-Voice* asserted in a full-page advertisement for the United Jewish Campaign of Houston in 1942, "This is a campaign to DECIDE the destiny of a people!"[82]

Gerry Cristol, historian and archivist of Temple Emanu-El, has remarked that these and similar efforts generated a new unity in Dallas's Jewish community, a solidifying process that the war and the refugee crisis had already begun. Whereas German and Russian Jews in the city had previously "formed two separate social communities" revolving around the Reform and Conservative synagogues, she writes, "helping to raise funds for Israel's survival drew together long-established Dallas residents of both synagogues." Soon after, the city's Jewish country club, the Columbian, which had previously been an adjunct of the Reform congregation, began admitting growing numbers of Orthodox and Conservative members.[83] Irving Goldberg made a similar observation. In his view, the Jewish Federation, which through its affiliated groups represented

[82] *Jewish Herald-Voice* (18 March 1942).
[83] Cristol, 142.

Dallas Jewry as a whole, became the vanguard of Jewish activism "[a]s the lives of Dallas Jews became more complicated and as they became more intimately involved with the more cosmic issues presented to the American and world Jewish community." As long as "the primal demand upon Dallas Jewry relates to Israel and to national causes," he wrote, "local tensions between and among Jews in Dallas will have little influence upon the effectiveness of the Federation."[84]

As their support for Israel grew, many Texas Jews began making the journeys to Israel that became a hallmark of American-Jewish identification. Albert Granoff traveled there in 1953 and described its profound effect on his sense of himself as a Jew. "You have no idea what impression Tel-Aviv made on me," he recalled in his memoirs. "To see a Yiddish policeman talking Hebrew to passers-by, to see Hebrew signs all over the streets. Wherever you are and wherever you go nothing but Jewish faces; some speaking Hebrew, some Yiddish, and others in English and many other languages. It had a tremendous effect on me."[85]

Bertha and Charles Bender of Breckenridge provide a unique instance of Texas Jewish support of Israel. Bertha, who was born in Lithuania, and Charles, from Odessa, Russia, met in 1911 at a Zionist meeting in Portsmouth, Virginia, where Bertha was the Zionist Organization's secretary; they were married the next year. Ambitious and energetic, Charles imagined that opportunities would be greater in Texas than on the East Coast, and the couple traveled to Dallas in 1912, where he established the Star Bottling Company and founded the Texas

[84] Irving L. Goldberg, 93-94.
[85] Granoff, 224.

Young Zionists of Dallas. They went to Lubbock a few years later to operate a retail store, then moved to Breckenridge in 1919 to open the Bender Department Store, which they operated together until 1953. Lacking a synagogue in West Texas, Charles helped to organize Breckenridge's Temple Beth Israel and served as its first president.[86]

The couple became deeply devoted to Texas – "we were destined to grow together," Bertha said of her adoptive state – and Charles took to wearing elaborate western costumes, including neckties decorated with pictures of oil rigs and leather cowboy boots embossed with the Star of David.[87] Bender's ostentatious outfits made an impression during his frequent visits to Israel. The *Jerusalem Post* described "America's famous 'Cowboy Zionist' from Breckenridge, Texas" as "colourful in dress and striking in personality." Bender's "sweeping sombrero, his lurid shirts and his distinctive cowboy boots, decorated with blue-and-white Magen David," the paper reported, "have already attracted widespread attention on the streets of Haifa and Tel Aviv."[88] "We always visited with Prime Minister David Ben Gurion," Bertha claimed, "and he dubbed my husband Charles as 'The Jewish Cowboy from Texas.'" Other Israelis delighted Charles by referring to him as "Tex" or "Little Tex."[89]

The *Jerusalem Post* was careful, however, to point out that "there is more to Charlie Bender than just the cowboy pose." The Benders had sent both of their

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[86] Bertha Bender, "I Remember When" (November 1983), TJHS Box 3A164, Folder 2.
[87] Betty Ewing, "A delight at 101: Bertha Bender's life was destined to grow with the state she adopted," *Houston Chronicle* (6 September 1989); Photograph of Charles and Bertha Bender in Israel, TJHS 3Z290, Folder "Bender, Bertha."
[88] "Cowboy Zionist," *Jerusalem Post* (11 September 1957).
[89] Ewing, "A delight at 101"; Merlon Montgomery, Jr., "Charlie Bender – A Man To Remember," *Breckenridge American* (4 August 1970).

sons to school in Israel, and as president of the Southwest Zionist Region and in his efforts to promote Israel Bonds, Bender "has been hailed as a master salesman for Israel." In 1957, the Benders made a large donation to build the Charles and Bertha Bender Laboratory in Israel with facilities for aeronautics research. The *Post* praised Charles as "a sincere and deeply devoted Zionist who has already done much for the country."[90]

Charles Bender is an especially colorful example of a common phenomenon: Texas Jews, steeped in the provincial concerns of their Texas life, who were nevertheless deeply concerned with global Jewish events. Earlier Jewish Texans had often imagined themselves as isolated and distinct from Jews elsewhere in the world: "Pardon me for having forgotten the [Jewish] New Year," wrote an El Paso Jew in September of 1876 to his family in Germany, "for one is not reminded of it here."[91] As late as the 1950s, Diane Ravitch recalled, Jewish education in Texas provided little sense of Jewish identification. "My Jewish education [in Houston] was limited to Sunday school in our Reform temple," she wrote. "We learned a smattering of Jewish history. I was so poorly educated as a Jew that I didn't know how poorly educated I was."[92] The critical events of the 1940s, however, were forcing Texas Jews to peer out from behind their provincial curtains to see a Jewish world that was rapidly changing. World War II, and especially the Holocaust and the establishment of Israel, turned their attention away from local concerns and the immediate realities that had

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[90] "Cowboy Zionist," *Jerusalem Post* (11 September 1957).
[91] Ernst Kohlberg, *Letters of Ernst Kohlberg, 1875-1877*, tr. and ed. Walter K. Kohlberg (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1973): 39.
[92] Ravitch, 391.

underscored their separateness and difference from each other and from Jews elsewhere. These crises, in fact, *became* local concerns as immigrants from around the country and around the world entered their communities and brought rich and complex new perspectives, and global events proved that they were no longer as isolated as they once had thought.

Chapter 8. "Are You Going to Serve Us or Are You Not?": Texas Jews and the Black Civil Rights Movement

The first sit-in to challenge racial segregation in Texas public facilities occurred at Weingarten's Grocery Store #26 on Almeda Street in Houston's predominantly black Third Ward. On Friday afternoon, March 4, 1960, following the example of nonviolent protesters in North Carolina and Georgia, about thirty-five students from Texas Southern University, an historically black institution, gathered around the campus flagpole and then marched to the nearby store. Weingarten's was a strategic choice for a first target: not only did it operate a whites-only lunch counter in spite of its primarily black clientele, but the Weingarten's chain, which from its Houston founding had grown to about thirty stores, was a local institution.[1] Moreover, its Jewish owner, Joseph Weingarten, was a pillar of the community, widely esteemed for his social and charitable work: he was on the governing boards of several area hospitals; B'nai B'rith and the National Conference of Christians and Jews had both honored him for his civic activity; and he had recently met with several European heads of state and with Pope John XXIII to discuss world peace, a cause he had adopted as a personal crusade after a visit to Israel.[2] And yet Weingarten's company, under his

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[1] "Negroes in Sit-Down at 2d Houston Store," *Houston Chronicle* (5 March 1960); Thomas R. Cole, "*No Color Is My Kind": The Life of Eldrewey Stearns and the Integration of Houston* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997): 26; Gregory Curtis, "The First Protester," *Texas Monthly* (June 1997): 7; "The Black Community Today," *165 Years of Historic Houston* <http://www.neosoft.com/~sgriffin/houstonhistory/ethnic/history3blacks.htm> [Accessed 12 July 2002].

[2] "Joseph Weingarten," *The Handbook of Texas Online* <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/WW/fwe15.html> [Accessed 12 July 2002]; Cole, 26; Ruthe Winegarten and

personal management, regularly demeaned large numbers of its customers, refusing them service and employment even while profiting from their patronage in their own neighborhoods. The hypocrisy was too pungent for the protest's organizers to ignore.

When they arrived, the students passed through the store and took seats at the counter, prepared either to be served or to be arrested. The few customers already sitting at the counter quietly finished their meals and left, allowing the protesters to occupy all thirty seats. One of their leaders, Eldrewey Stearns, a fiery young black law student and possibly a descendant of Adolphus Sterne, one of the state's pioneer Jews, rushed to a pay phone to contact police and media, who promptly arrived and prepared for any possible trouble, though none was to occur.[3] Weingarten's company officials also appeared and invited some of the protesters to a private meeting upstairs, where they tried to work out a quiet solution. For the students, however, negotiation was impossible. "Are you going to serve us or are you not?" one asked. "I don't think you can afford not to – you've got too much money involved." When the students refused to leave, company officials shut the counter down rather than serve them, but the protesters kept their seats, quietly reading newspapers and magazines until 8:30 that evening, soon before the store closed for the day. The following morning, they resumed their sit-in at Weingarten's, while another group of protesters occupied the soda fountain at a nearby drug store, which also immediately closed the

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Cathy Schechter, *Deep in the Heart: the Lives and Legends of Texas Jews* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1990): 212.

[3] Cole, 1. Cole claims, presumably on Stearns's authority, that Stearns's "great-great-grandfather was apparently Adolphus Sterne, a German-Jewish immigrant and a founding father of the Texas Republic."

counter.[4] The next week, about 150 TSU students, inspired by these early successes, ventured out of the Third Ward to challenge downtown stores on Main Street.[5]

Within a few days sit-in demonstrations had spread to lunch counters throughout the city and to the City Hall cafeteria, and managers of restaurants and department stores began working behind the scenes to integrate their establishments as quickly and quietly as possible. Compared to other Southern communities, Houston was relatively progressive: the city had already desegregated its municipal golf courses (in 1950, under court order), public library (in 1953), and city bus system (in 1954). As occurred elsewhere, integration of the public schools met with much official resistance within the school system and was not achieved until 1960, and then only to a token degree. Largely due to pressure like that applied at Weingarten's, however, most of Houston's stores and restaurants, as well as its municipal parks, beaches and swimming pools, were fully integrated by 1963 with little public notice. [6]

The initial protest at Weingarten's illustrates an important and often overlooked irony of the American civil-rights era: even as many Jews were deeply involved in the movement, inspired by the ancient Jewish commitment to social justice and by an ultimate concern for their own self-protection, others were part of the segregationist system the protesters sought to destroy. Jewish merchants owned and managed the largest and most prestigious stores in many Southern

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[4] "Negroes in Sit-Down at 2d Houston Store"; Cole, 1, 29; Curtis, 7.
[5] Cole, 40.
[6] "The Black Community Today."

cities. In accordance with local laws and customs, they generally operated these businesses on a racially segregated basis, refusing to hire African-American salespeople, waiting on black customers in separate areas of the store (when they did so at all), prohibiting black customers from trying on merchandise, and forbidding their use of in-store restaurants, lunch counters and rest rooms.

In Texas, every major store in every major city was Jewish-run: Joske's and Frost Brothers in San Antonio; Sakowitz's, Weingarten's, Battlesteins and Foley Brothers in Houston; and in Dallas, Titche-Goettinger, Sanger Brothers, E.M. Kahn, A. Harris & Company and, of course, Neiman-Marcus, the city's flagship retailing institution.[7] Like their gentile-owned competitors, all of these companies discriminated against African-American customers as a matter of course, and until the early 1960s none of them employed black sales clerks. Stanley Marcus, head of Neiman-Marcus and one of Dallas's civic giants for sixty years, later confessed that such practices, in which Neiman's participated, were "designed to discourage black patronage," presumably making the stores more appealing for white customers.[8]

As members of their cities' business communities, Texas Jewish merchants were in a unique and precarious position. Given their own history of

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[7] All of these stores remained under the operation of their founding families through the 1960s with the exception of Joske's, which was purchased by Hahn Department Stores in 1929 and then sold to Allied Store Corporation in 1932, and Foley's, which was sold to Ohio-based Federated Department Stores in 1945. These stores, therefore, were no longer under Jewish (or even local) management by the time of the Civil Rights Movement, when Foley's non-Jewish leadership was instrumental in the effort to integrate Houston and when it became the first of the city's major department stores to hire black salespeople. In contrast, the gentile managers of Joske's held out against integration in San Antonio for several months after other local and national chains in the city had agreed to a desegregation plan.

[8] Stanley Marcus, *Minding The Store: A Memoir* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1974): 369.

ethnic persecution, Jews had reason to empathize with African Americans facing similar discrimination. "[L]ook me right in the face," Mayor William Levy of Sherman told an audience of black technical-school students in 1890, "and you behold in me a man whose ancestors were also slaves – whose forefathers were also held in the iron chains of bondage 400 long and bitter years."[9] During the long years of Jim Crow segregation in Texas, however, Jews were complicit in maintaining the racist system, not only in their own shops and businesses but also in the city governments and municipal codes to which they acquiesced as citizens. Like Joe Weingarten, no matter what their personal views on social justice were, they went along with the segregationist practices of the communities where they lived.

Once protests and boycotts began, however, Jews in many Texas cities, Dallas in particular, rose to the occasion more quickly than most other whites. In some cases, as with Dallas's Julius Schepps and Stanley Marcus, they used their position within the business establishment to promote integration by exerting personal pressure on business and civic leaders (in Texas, usually the same people) who were their friends and associates. Rabbis served as moral guides for their communities, speaking not only to Jewish audiences but to Christians as well, and they served on municipal boards and steering committees to guide their cities through the difficult transitions of integration. As earlier crises had done, the Civil Rights Movement required Texas Jews to redefine the boundaries between themselves and others, finding a place between African Americans, with

[9] William Levy in *Sabbath Visitor* (1 September 1890 and 15 September 1890), reprinted as "A Jew Views Black Education: Texas – 1890," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly* 8 (July 1976): 352-53.

whom they sympathized but otherwise shared little, and the white business class which had generally accepted them as members but whose racial views were clearly in the wrong. The Civil Rights Movement gave these Jews an opportunity both to serve their Jewish social consciences and to fortify their place in the realm of civic leadership, and it illustrated the paradox of Jewish identity in Texas: Jews are both at home in Texas and apart from it.

The unique role Jews could play as the Civil Rights Movement began to unfold was not lost on their community leaders. Rabbi Floyd Fierman of El Paso told his congregation after the Supreme Court's public school desegregation decision in 1954 that Jews must be involved in the social changes that were to come. "The Jew is frequently called a middleman," he explained. "By middleman it is meant that he stands midway between the producer & the consumer." The economic term, however, also had "a cultural significance," as Jews had mediated between competing cultures – Arabs and Hellenistic Greeks, for example – throughout their history. "Economically, culturally, also religiously & racially he is a middleman," Fierman continued. In a new era, "farsighted Jewish lay leaders & rabbis are concerning themselves with a relationship that has been haunting America: the relationship of the brownskin man & the whiteskin man & the Jew here again is fulfilling an historical role."[10] More recently, historians Mark K. Bauman and Arnold Shankman have used a different economic analogy to describe Southern rabbis as "ethnic brokers" who

[10] Floyd S. Fierman, "The Jew and the Negro," Floyd S. Fierman Papers, AJA Manuscript Collection 649.

"bridge the gap between different cultures."[11] Standing along a conceptual frontier that invisibly divided them from their neighbors and, in a sense, excused them from the South's painful history of racism and violence, Jews sought the middle ground, fashioning means of improving themselves and their communities without plunging into the extremism of either side.

In Texas, Jews managed this balancing act carefully and successfully. It is surely significant that even as Jewish retailers were among the segregators, African-American activists praised rabbis for their loyalty to the cause of civil rights. Peter Johnson, the self-described "first legitimate civil rights worker to be sent to the Southwest," considered Rabbi Levi Olan of Dallas his mentor in the city, "one of our strongest supporters."[12] San Antonio activist Claude Black made similar comments about Rabbi David Jacobson, "a friend to the black community when white friends were scarce."[13] It might thus appear that the Jewish community was divided, with rabbis offering the moral direction while retailers and businessmen joined the ranks of segregationists, but this was hardly the case. Even within the civic establishment, where prominent Jews exercised tremendous power, they pushed for change with a subtle combination of firmness and compromise, nudging their fellow leaders along while yielding when necessary to keep the peace.

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[11] Mark K. Bauman and Arnold Shankman, "The Rabbi as Ethnic Broker: The Case of David Marx," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 2 (Spring 1983): 51.

[12] Peter Johnson, in "'The Jewish Role in Desegregating Dallas': Meeting of the Dallas Jewish Historical Society, January 6, 1998" (Dallas: Dallas Jewish Historical Society, 1998), Dallas Public Library.

[13] Claude Black, paraphrased by Karl Preuss, "Rabbi David Jacobson and the Integration of San Antonio," in Mark K. Bauman and Berkley Kalin, eds., *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights, 1880s To 1990s* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997):146.

Southern Jews, including those in Texas, had a long and complicated history with their African-American neighbors. Since the years immediately after the Civil War, when Jewish peddlers and merchants first began arriving in the Southern states, they maintained a relatively cordial relationship with black Southerners, treating them with a respect that came as a refreshing surprise compared to the behavior of other whites. These merchants, wrote Harry Golden, "were probably the first white people in the South who paid the black people any respect at all, who regarded them as equals."[14] Jewish sellers extended credit to black buyers and let them try on clothing before paying for it, a practice which endeared them to these customers while making the merchandise unacceptable to most potential white buyers: as Arnold Shankman has written, "those Jews who sold clothing to Negroes normally sacrificed their white clientele," a loss which "was certainly appreciated by blacks."[15] John Dollard, who extensively examined life in rural Southern communities in the 1930s, noted that black buyers appreciated the willingness of Jewish storeowners to bargain with them and to adjust their pricing, while gentile merchants seemed to prefer turning sales away: black customers "get satisfaction out of the fact that the Jewish merchant appears to allow himself to be beaten," Dollard observed.[16]

Such policies, however, were not a matter of altruism or pure good will: they were part of a deliberate business strategy to find a niche that gentile

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[14] Harry Golden, *Our Southern Landsman* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1974): 157.
[15] Arnold Shankman, *Ambivalent Friends: Afro-Americans View the Immigrant* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982): 120.
[16] John Dollard, *Caste And Class In A Southern Town* (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1937): 129.

merchants were ignoring and to prosper by it. As Stephen Whitfield has explained, Jewish merchants in the South were "more interested in customers than in customs of racial discrimination, more committed to making sales than to making trouble, more worried about inventory than about integration."[17] Arnold Shankman has noted that many Jewish shopkeepers early in the twentieth century hired black employees, in part "to provide them with jobs and to teach them skills needed to open their own businesses," but only on the condition that "Negroes demanded that it be done and if blacks then patronized those stores": in stores where black clientele failed to materialize, Shankman observes, black employees quickly vanished.[18] Jewish merchants ran advertisements in African-American newspapers, a practice which, despite its egalitarian overtones, was also clearly self-serving. John Dollard put the matter most succinctly: in treating black customers courteously, Jews were "putting business before caste principles."[19] Southern Jewish merchants, then, including the phenomenally successful ones in Texas cities and towns, were hardly social activists, but they were savvy business people who saw an untapped market and exploited it: as newcomers to Southern states like Texas, outsiders to ancient local customs and traditions, they were able to put business before caste principles while their gentile competitors were not.

However, as the segregation of Southern cities hardened by the mid-twentieth century and the Texas oil boom and subsequent economic prosperity created a new class of wealthy white purchasers, it became harder to distinguish

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[17] Stephen J. Whitfield, "Commercial Passions: The Southern Jew as Businessman," *American Jewish History* 71 (March 1982): 353.
[18] Shankman, 120, 122.
[19] Dollard, 129.

between business and caste principles: Jewish merchants became ever more protective of their white clientele, and their stores became bastions of racial prejudice. As Leon Harris, a long-time manager at A. Harris in Dallas, has explained simply, "The South was segregated, so the stores were segregated." [20] Paradoxically, the willingness to put business ahead of racial differences that previously had allowed Jews to cultivate friendly relationships with black customers now made them segregationists: with no clearly articulated principles regarding race, with no long involvement in the social conflicts and contracts that created the Jim Crow South, Jewish merchants simply went with the flow, with whatever best served their business interests year to year. By the 1950s, that meant unqualified segregation.

The degree to which Jewish Texans acquiesced to segregationist policies is clear in the observations of immigrants who, upon entering Texas communities, were shocked by the treatment of African Americans and the willingness of local Jews to permit it. After boarding a train from Galveston to San Antonio in 1910, Rabbi Alexander Gurwitz, who had just arrived with his family as part of the Galveston Movement, noticed that African-American passengers were sitting in separate rail cars. "This made a bad impression on us," he wrote years later in his memoirs. "In such a beautiful, free land, where the cultures of all lands flowed so smoothly, it seemed inconsistent and wrong to distinguish between one race and another. How had these blacks sinned?" Gurwitz's nephew, who had been in Texas for several years, explained casually that "[t]here was a well established

[20] Leon Harris, *Merchant Princes: An Intimate History of Jewish Famlies Who Built Great Department Stores* (New York: Kodansha International, 1994 [1979]): 127.

history of such prejudice, and it would take a long while before it could be changed."[21]

A similar event occurred forty years later in Dallas when Mike Jacobs, an Auschwitz survivor who had been in the city only a week, boarded a public bus:

> On paying my bus fare, I went to an empty seat toward the back of the bus. The bus driver stopped the bus and waved toward me. I thought he was waving to the black people for the black people to get off the bus. He stopped at the next stop, again motioning, and I still did not know what was going on. He then started yelling and did not move the bus. A man who had just gotten on the bus came in and talked to the bus driver as he pointed to the back of the bus. The man then came over to me and introduced himself in English. When I shrugged my shoulders, he realized I didn't speak English. He then asked me in Yiddish if I spoke Yiddish. I answered "Yes" in Yiddish, and he then told me that I was not allowed to sit in the back of the bus; the back of the bus was for the black people. He showed me a sign on the bus saying the front was for whites and the back was for blacks. I really couldn't understand what the difference was, that I would have to sit in the front and the blacks in the back of the bus. He then said, "Go to the front, don't make any trouble," as the bus had still not moved. [22]

Jacobs refused to change seats, stating that "no one can force me." When the man asked again, Jacobs got off the bus and walked the rest of the way. [23]

Black Texans have remembered that the segregationist policies which Jewish managers upheld made shopping at Jewish-owned stores a painful and embarrassing experience. Soon after she arrived in Dallas in 1956, Eddie Bernice Johnson, a nurse and businesswoman who serves today in the U.S. House of Representatives, tried to buy a hat at A. Harris. "I was told that I could not try on

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[21] Alexander Ziskind Gurwitz, *Memories of Two Generations*, tr. Amram Prero, vol. 2 [c.1932]: 208-209.
[22] Mike Jacobs, *Holocaust Survivor: Mike Jacobs' Triumph Over Tragedy, a Memoir*, ed. Ginger Jacobs (Austin: Eakin Press, 2001): 137-38.
[23] Ibid, 138.

hats or shoes," she remembered later. "They had to measure my head and then go over and measure the hat." Johnson received courteous treatment at Neiman's, but only because she befriended a white sales clerk who let her in through a back entrance to wait on her privately.[24] Bettie M. Patterson, a black public school teacher, remembered Houston in the 1950s as a place "filled with segregation, police brutality, white supremacy, and inferior schools," and she experienced discrimination most personally on public buses and in the city's famous department stores. "My friends and I loved to look at all the pretty things they had in Sakowitz, Neiman Marcus [which opened a Houston store in 1955] and Battlestein," she wrote, "but we hated how they treated us. From the moment we entered, . . . a store security person would obviously follow us around as if we had no rights to look nor purchase the merchandise." Some black customers, she said, pretended to be shopping for their employers in order to buy from these stores with less trouble. "I was really glad when Sakowitz and Battlestein went out of business," she said, "and hope I will live to see Neiman Marcus do the same." [25]

These comments reveal a deep resentment among African-Americans toward Jewish retailers, but segregation was a social requirement that Jews were unwilling to ignore. Their acquiescence was both a cause and an effect of their rise to the highest levels of power in Texas cities: indeed, in the 1950s it would

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[24] Quoted in Jim Schutze, *The Accommodation: The Politics of Race in an American City* (Secaucus: Citadel Press, 1986): 87.

[25] Bettie M. Patterson, "My Neighborhood in the 1950s and 1960s" <http://www.uh.edu/hti/curriculum_units/houston/Patterson_Unit.pdf> [accessed 23 July 2002]. The Sakowitz chain filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in 1985. The Battlestein family sold their store in 1967 to new owners who also bought Frost Brothers in San Antonio, merged the companies, and operated both stores under the Frost name until going out of business in 1989. Neiman-Marcus merged with California-based Broadway-Hale Stores in 1969, which later merged with other chains to become Carter, Hawley, Hale, Incorporated, which continues to operate Neiman's stores nationwide.

have been difficult to argue that Jews were not fully part of the state's business establishment. In Dallas, which provides a striking example, at least two Jews, Julius Schepps and Fred Florence, were members of the twenty-two-seat Dallas Citizens Council, whose self-appointed members ruled the city like Florentine oligarchs. Sam Bloom, a Dallas advertising executive, claimed that "the great philosophical nurseries" of the city's commercial class were the Highland Park Methodist Church, Temple Emanu-El, the Highland Park Presbyterian Church, the Park Cities Baptist Church, Republic National Bank, and the First National Bank: with Fred Florence at the head of Republic, Jews directed two of these six institutions.[26]

The growing involvement of Jews in the political affairs of Texas cities was built on the rapid growth of those cities and of their Jewish communities after World War II (See Table 9). In the decades between 1950 and 2000, the Texas population grew more than 170%, with the greatest growth occurring in its largest metropolitan areas: San Antonio grew almost threefold, while Dallas and Houston each grew about fourfold.[27] The state's Jewish population also grew from just under 50,000 in 1950 to about 128,000 in 2000, an increase of 156%.[28] These changes occurred within the context of a general American population shift from Northern cities to the "Sunbelt," the states of the Old South and the Southwest, and in particular to the Sunbelt's exponentially growing cities: Atlanta and Los

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[26] Schutze, 57. Schutze is paraphrasing Bloom's remarks, which Schutze does not quote directly.
[27] U.S. Census as reported in *The World Almanac and Book of Facts, 2003* (New York: World Almanac Books, 2003): 399; "Texas: Population of Counties by Decennial Census, 1900 to 1990" <http://www.census.gov/population/cencounts/tx190090.txt>; and "American FactFinder," <http://factfinder.census.gov>. Jewish population figures come from the *American Jewish Yearbook* for the appropriate years. All web sites were accessed 19 February 2003.
[28] *American Jewish Yearbook*.

Table 9. Jewish and General Population of U.S., Texas, and Selected Cities, 1950-2000.

		General		Jewish	
Location	Date	Population	Growth	Population	Growth
United States	1950	151,325,798	14.5%	5,000,000	4.8%
	1960	179,323,175	18.5%	5,531,500	10.6%
	1970	203,211,926	13.3%	5,870,000	6.1%
	1980	226,545,805	11.5%	5,920,890	0.9%
	1990	248,709,873	9.8%	5,981,000	1.0%
	2000	281,421,906	13.2%	6,136,000	2.6%
Texas	1950	7,711,194	20.2%	49,196	n/a
	1960	9,579,677	24.2%	60,900	23.8%
	1970	11,198,655	16.9%	65,520	7.6%
	1980	14,225,513	27.0%	72,545	10.7%
	1990	16,986,510	19.4%	109,000	50.3%
	2000	20,851,820	22.8%	128,000	17.4%
Dallas (Dallas Co.)	1950	614,799	54.3%	12,000	15.4%
	1960	951,527	54.8%	17,800	48.3%
	1970	1,327,321	39.5%	22,000	23.6%
	1980	1,556,390	17.3%	20,000	-9.1%
	1990	1,852,810	19.0%	34,000	70.0%
	2000	2,218,899	19.8%	45,000	32.4%
Houston (Harris Co.)	1950	806,701	52.5%	14,000	40.0%
	1960	1,243,158	54.1%	17,000	21.4%
	1970	1,741,912	40.1%	21,000	23.5%
	1980	2,409,547	38.3%	28,000	33.3%
	1990	2,818,199	17.0%	42,000	50.0%
	2000	3,400,578	20.7%	42,000	0.0%
San Antonio (Bexar Co.)	1950	500,460	48.0%	6,800	-1.4%
	1960	687,151	37.3%	6,100	-10.3%
	1970	830,460	20.9%	6,250	2.5%
	1980	988,800	19.1%	6,500	4.0%
	1990	1,185,394	19.9%	10,000	53.8%
	2000	1,392,931	17.5%	11,000	10.0%

Sources: For U.S. and Texas populations: U.S. Census as reported in *The World Almanac and Book of Facts, 2003* (New York: World Almanac Books, 2003): 399; for county populations, 1940-1990: U.S. Census as reported in "Texas: Population of Counties by Decennial Census, 1900 to 1990," <http://www.census.gov/population/cencounts/tx190090.txt>; for county populations, 2000: U.S. Census as reported in U.S. Census Bureau, "American FactFinder," <http://factfinder.census.gov>; for all Jewish populations: *American Jewish Yearbook*. All web sites accessed 19 February 2003.

Angeles, Miami and Phoenix, Houston, Dallas-Fort Worth, and San Antonio. "A great migration is under way [and] has, in fact, been going on since World War II," write the authors of an historical survey of this migration, a "demographic explosion" that has "reversed the century-old movement of young people and blacks from the South to the North and represents one of the greatest population shifts in American history."[29] The growth of the Sunbelt is largely attributable to increased federal spending in the region on defense and other industries, the perception of a favorable business climate, and the ever-elusive and hard-to-define "quality of life" (enhanced by the invention of air conditioning) that it afforded.[30] Servicemen stationed in Southern states during World War II were often surprised to discover such a pleasant environment, and thousands moved to the South after the war: "A nation in transit during the war discovered the south," writes historian Randall M. Miller, and "heavy federal spending continued to bolster southern urban economies in the postwar era."[31] Texas benefited greatly from all of these developments and typifies the rapid population growth of the Sunbelt phenomenon.

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[29] Bradley R. Rice and Richard M. Bernard, "Introduction," *Sunbelt Cities: Politics And Growth Since World War II*, ed. Bradley R. Rice and Richard M. Bernard (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983): 1. For another study of the Sunbelt phenomenon, see Randall M. Miller and George E. Pozzetta, eds., *Shades of the Sunbelt: Essays on Ethnicity, Race, and the Urban South* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988). For more on the Jewish migration to the Sunbelt, see Deborah Dash Moore, "Jewish Migration to the Sunbelt," in Miller and Pozzetta, 41-52; Sidney Goldstein and Alice Goldstein, *Jews on the Move: Implications for Jewish Identity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996): 89; and Deborah Dash Moore, *To the Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and L.A.* (New York: The Free Press, 1994).

[30] Rice and Bernard, 11.

[31] Randall M. Miller, "The Development of the Modern Urban South: An Historical Overview," in Miller and Pozzetta, 4,6. For the appeal of Southern cities to Jewish war veterans, see Moore, *Golden Cities*, 11ff.

Jews were a significant part of this trend as large numbers from Northern cities, especially New York, left for the Sunbelt states following World War II (See Table 10). In 1940, nearly 70% of the nation's Jews lived in the Northeast region – with some 46% living in New York State alone – and another 19% lived in the Midwest, mostly in Chicago. The same year, only 7% of the American Jewish population lived in the fourteen states of the Sunbelt. By 1950, a change was already visible: the Northeast's proportion of the total had fallen to 67% and the Midwest's to 14%, while the Sunbelt's proportion nearly doubled to about 13%. By 2000 it was clear that a major shift had taken place, as the Northeast contained only 46% (with just 27% remaining in New York State) and the Midwest just about 11%, while the Sunbelt states had come to hold a third of the nation's Jewish population.

As Deborah Dash Moore has shown in *To the Golden Cities*, most of the growth in the Sunbelt occurred in only two communities, Los Angeles and Miami: "Eighty percent of all Jews moving south after the war settled in Miami," she writes, "and 70 percent of all Jews heading west landed in Los Angeles." These figures, she says, suggest that "the particular lure of a leisure lifestyle" drew Jews to these seaside communities.[32] To be sure, the Jewish populations of Atlanta, Phoenix, Dallas and Houston grew significantly in the decades following World War II, but it is clear from Moore's study that two deep channels directed Jewish migration from New York to California and Florida, while comparatively few Jewish migrants ventured to the states in between. Texas population figures

[32] Moore, *To the Golden Cities*, 27.

Table 10. American Jewish Population by Region, 1940-2000.

Region*	1940	1950	1960	1970
United States (Total)	4,770,647	5,000,000	5,531,500	6,059,730
Northeast				
Jewish Population	3,307,080	3,369,750	3,682,700	3,828,135
% of U.S. Jewish Population	69.3%	67.4%	66.6%	63.2%
Midwest				
Jewish Population	914,135	715,000	764,700	732,610
% of U.S. Jewish Population	19.2%	14.3%	13.8%	12.1%
"Sunbelt"				
Jewish Population	339,373	660,050	819,700	1,171,645
% of U.S. Jewish Population	7.1%	13.2%	14.8%	19.3%

Region	1980	1990	2000
United States (Total)	5,920,890	5,981,000	6,136,000
Northeast			
Jewish Population	3,390,411	3,029,000	2,826,800
% of U.S. Jewish Population	57.3%	50.6%	46.1%
Midwest			
Jewish Population	689,825	669,450	701,450
% of U.S. Jewish Population	11.7%	11.2%	11.4%
"Sunbelt"			
Jewish Population	1,440,920	1,825,100	2,023,600
% of U.S. Jewish Population	24.3%	30.5%	33.0%

Source: *American Jewish Yearbook*

* Following the U.S. Census Bureau, the "Northeast" includes to the states of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York; the "Midwest" includes North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan, Indiana and Ohio. Following Rice and Bernard (p. 7), the "Sunbelt" consists of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California. While Rice and Bernard divide California in half, including only its Southern portion in their definition of the Sunbelt, it has proven impossible for me to divide the Jewish population accordingly, so I have included California's entire Jewish population in my calculations.

bear out Moore's observations (See Table 11). Between 1940 and 2000, as Jewish New Yorkers were moving cross-country, the proportion of Jews to non-Jews rose markedly in the states where they settled. In California, the Jewish population rose from 2.3% of the state's total population in 1940 to more than 4% ten years later, settling at about 3% by 2000. Florida saw its Jewish community

Table 11. Jews as a Proportion of the Population in California, Florida, and Texas, 1940-2000.

State	1940	1950	1960	1970
California				
General Population	6,907,387	10,586,223	15,717,204	19,971,069
Jewish Population	157,471	430,500	530,300	721,045
Jews as % of Population	2.28%	4.07%	3.37%	3.61%
Florida				
General Population	1,897,414	2,771,305	4,951,560	6,791,418
Jewish Population	21,276	84,000	112,100	260,000
Jews as % of Population	1.12%	3.03%	2.26%	3.83%
Texas				
General Population	6,414,824	7,711,194	9,579,677	11,198,655
Jewish Population	49,196	52,500	60,900	67,505
Jews as % of Population	0.77%	0.68%	0.64%	0.60%

State	1980	1990	2000
California			
General Population	23,667,902	29,760,021	33,871,648
Jewish Population	753,945	919,500	994,000
Jews as % of Population	3.19%	3.09%	2.93%
Florida			
General Population	9,746,324	12,937,926	15,982,378
Jewish Population	454,880	567,000	628,000
Jews as % of Population	4.67%	4.38%	3.93%
Texas			
General Population	14,229,191	16,986,510	20,851,820
Jewish Population	72,545	109,000	128,000
Jews as % of Population	0.51%	0.64%	0.61%

Sources: For general population figures, U.S. Census as reported in *The World Almanac and Book of Facts, 2003* (New York: World Almanac Books, 2003): 399; for Jewish population figures: *American Jewish Yearbook*.

grow even more dramatically, from 1.1% of the state's total population in 1940, past a 1980 high of 4.7%, to settle just below 4% in 2000.[33] California and Florida were both growing tremendously in this period, but these figures show that Jews were entering these states at a greater rate than non-Jews, causing their proportionate numbers to rise. This was not the case in Texas, where Jewish in-

[33] U.S. Census as reported in *The World Almanac and Book of Facts, 2003* (New York: World Almanac Books, 2003): 399; *American Jewish Yearbook*.

migration did not outpace that of non-Jews. On the contrary, the Jewish proportion of Texas's population *fell* between 1940 and 2000 – from 0.8% to 0.6% of the state's total population, a proportion that changed little throughout the state's history and is much lower than that of California and Florida.[34] If a "leisure lifestyle" was calling Jews to the Golden Cities, then they apparently did not perceive Texas as a place of similar leisure or opportunity.[35]

Within Texas, dramatic population shifts were occurring as the state's Jewish population moved into the cities and abandoned the rural areas where the majority of them had once lived (See Table 12). In 1900, only 47% of Texas Jews lived in the state's ten largest cities (Austin, Beaumont, Corpus Christi, Dallas, El Paso, Fort Worth, Galveston, Houston, San Antonio and Waco) with the majority scattered throughout its smaller rural communities. By midcentury, rural Jews accounted for just 15% of the state's total Jewish population, and by 2000 only 3%. Of the largest cities, Dallas and Houston became the unrivaled centers (See Table 13): in 1950, nearly 53% of the state's Jews lived just in these two cities, and by 2000 that portion climbed to 68%. Adding in San Antonio, the state's three largest cities are today home to more than 75% of its Jewish citizens. The urbanization of Texas Jewry was a century-long process, but it was most conspicuously after World War II that Texas Jews became not only an

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[34] Ibid.

[35] Given the similarities of the Texas climate, economy, and lifestyle to those of California and Florida, it is curious that the Jewish population of Texas should be so conspicuously low in comparison, or that nothing comparable to the mass Jewish postwar migrations to Miami and Los Angeles occurred in Texas cities which, with the exception of beachfront property, had many of the same advantages as the "Golden Cities." I have found no clear explanation for why this is so, and I venture none here. It may have to do with a perception that anti-Semitism is greater in Texas than in the other states, but I have found no documentation to demonstrate this perception nor, indeed, its truthfulness.

Table 12. Jewish and General Urban and Rural Populations of Texas, 1900-2000.

	General Population				Jewish Population			
Year	Total	Urban*	% Urban	% Rural	Total	Urban*	% Urban	% Rural
1900	3,048,710	469,148	15.4%	84.6%	15,000	6,975	46.5%	53.5%
1950	7,711,194	3,344,023	43.4%	56.6%	49,196	41,715	84.8%	15.2%
2000	20,851,820	10,979,900	52.7%	47.3%	128,000	124,150	97.0%	3%

Sources: For total general population: U.S. Census as reported in *The World Almanac and Book of Facts, 2003* (New York: World Almanac Books, 2003): 398-399; for county populations, 1900-1990: U.S. Census as reported in "Texas: Population of Counties by Decennial Census, 1900 to 1990," <http://www.census.gov/population/cencounts/tx190090.txt>; for county populations, 2000: U.S. Census as reported in U.S. Census Bureau, "American FactFinder," <http://factfinder.census.gov>; for all Jewish populations: *American Jewish Yearbook*. All web sites accessed 19 February 2003.

* Urban population is determined by totaling the populations of the counties of Bexar (San Antonio), Dallas (Dallas), El Paso (El Paso), Galveston (Galveston), Harris (Houston), Jefferson (Beaumont), McClennan (Waco), Nueces (Corpus Christi), Tarrant (Fort Worth), and Travis (Austin).

Table 13. Jewish Populations of Texas, Dallas, Houston and San Antonio, 1900-2000.

	1900		1950		2000	
Location	Jewish Pop.	% of TX Jewish Pop.	Jewish Pop.	% of TX Jewish Pop.	Jewish Pop.	% of TX Jewish Pop.
Texas	15,000	100%	49,196	100%	128,000	100%
Dallas	1,200	8.0%	12,000	24.4%	45,000	35.2%
Houston	2,500	16.7%	14,000	28.5%	42,000	32.8%
San Antonio	800	5.3%	6,800	13.8%	11,000	8.6%
Total	4,500	30.0%	32,800	66.7%	98,000	76.6%

Source: *American Jewish Yearbook*.

overwhelmingly urban people but also one whose social, religious and cultural life occurred almost exclusively in the rival cities of Houston and Dallas.

The effect of urbanization on the Jewish communities of small Texas towns was devastating. In his memoirs, Rabbi Samuel Rosinger of Beaumont quoted a colleague on the subject of the problems of rabbis in rural communities: "The first and foremost problem of a rabbi in a small congregation is how to get out of it." Rosinger himself was grateful to serve in a small town, "where I could enter into an intimate relationship with my congregation and serve them as teacher, guide, counselor, and comforter," but not all clergy felt so fortunate, and shrinking communities had trouble finding and keeping rabbis.[36] The small congregation in Kilgore, in East Texas, began as an Orthodox institution but switched to Reform when a Reform rabbi proved to be the only one they could hire. "In the '50s sometime they had trouble getting rabbis and they just got a Reform one," remembered one congregant. "That's what we got and we were lucky to have it."[37] Corsicana, which lies on the interstate highway between Dallas and Houston, was able to sustain both a Reform and an Orthodox congregation until the 1960s, when its shrinking Jewish population necessitated a change. In 1968, a single rabbi served both congregations, and many families joined both in order to help both survive. By 1980, however, the two congregations had dissolved, and the Reform congregation, Beth-El, sold its

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[36] Samuel Rosinger, "Deep in the Heart of Texas," in Stanley F. Chyet, ed., *Lives And Voices: A Collection of American Jewish Memoirs* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1972): 138.

[37] Sandra Sachnowitz, interviewed in Brian Cohen, dir., *At Home on the Range: Jewish Life in Texas* (New York: Carousel Film and Video, 1999).

historic synagogue.[38] For Jews remaining in Texas small towns, Jewish life became increasingly difficult, though not impossible, to maintain. "I believe that one's Judaism is such a personal quest that you find that amount of Judaism no matter where you live," observed Donn Bindler of Longview. "I think if you want Judaism to be a significant factor in your life, it can be just as much a significant factor in Longview, Texas, as in New York City. It may be more difficult, and you may have to drive to Dallas to get a matzoh."[39]

In cities with their own matzoh, however, especially in Houston and Dallas, the growing Jewish population not only made religious ritual relatively easy to preserve but also fueled the increased participation of Jews in the power structures of their cities: Jews, in fact, came to be among the leading citizens of both cities. Of the two, Dallas, where Jewish retailers and bankers were a conspicuous presence in the most powerful circles, provides the clearer example. Dallas in the 1950s was utterly dominated by its business community, which was run not by its elected officials so much as by a self-selected group of businessmen operating officially as the Dallas Citizens Council, a group that one writer described as "a collection of dollars represented by men."[40] The Dallas Citizens Council (which should not be confused with the segregationist White Citizens Councils of many Southern cities) originated in the early 1930s to facilitate the city's successful effort to host the 1936 Texas Centennial Exhibition and to oversee its planning, building and execution. After the Exhibition, leaders formed

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[38] Tommy Stringer, "A Most Unlikely Canaan: A Brief History of the Corsicana Jewish Community," 15, TJHS Box 3A170, Folder 1.
[39] Donn Bindler, interviewed in Cohen.
[40] Warren Leslie, *Dallas Public and Private* (1964), quoted in Schutze, 58.

an official and semi-permanent committee of twenty-two members, all powerful and successful businessmen, most also participants in the city's major social and religious institutions, including Temple Emanu-El.[41] Together, they set long-term goals for the city, selected and influenced office-holders, and altogether directed civic affairs: they operated the annual Texas State Fair (largely to their own profit), planned the location and design of freeways and neighborhoods, office buildings and parks (largely to accommodate their personal and corporate investments), and oversaw the racial segregation and gradual desegregation of their city. Under such oligarchical guidance, Dallas came to maturity in the 1950s as a bluff, well-oiled, conservative, hard-driving, and pragmatic commercial machine.

When R.L. Thornton, chairman of the Mercantile National Bank and future mayor, and Nate Adams, of First National Bank, sought out the Citizens Council's original members, "the last thing they wanted to have around was a bunch of citizens," writes Jim Schutze, a former correspondent for the *Dallas Times Herald*. "They wanted men who could sit down at a big table and play, the ones who had control over the money, who could say yes, make it happen and never have to ask anybody's permission, because they were the permission-givers."[42] Among the Council's long-time members were two Jews: Julius Schepps, a wholesale liquor distributor, member of every synagogue in town, and *de facto* leader of the Jewish community; and Fred Florence, president of Republic National Bank, former director of the Texas Centennial Exposition,

[41] Schutze, 57.
[42] Schutze, 60.

treasurer of Temple Emanu-El for twenty-five years, and son-in-law of Emanu-El's rabbi, David Lefkowitz. Other Dallas Jews such as Herbert Marcus and his son Stanley of Neiman's; Arthur Kramer of A. Harris; John Rosenfield, the arts editor of the *Dallas Morning News*; and Sam Bloom, an advertising executive, were not officially members of the Council but were close to those who were and thus exercised great influence in the city's public affairs.

The contribution of these leaders to Dallas's civic and cultural life was most obvious in the field of the fine arts. While the non-Jewish members of the city's leadership often expressed ambivalence toward the arts, they were willing to concede that symphonies, operas and museums contributed to the city's prestige and thus its commercial appeal. "I'm for the Symphony one hundred per cent," Mayor Thornton famously told a fundraiser. "The Symphony is good for Dallas. I'll be glad to do anything I can to help it, as long as you don't ask me to attend any concerts."[43] In contrast, the city's Jewish business leaders were usually at the forefront of bringing cultural events and instutions to Dallas, and they attended them loyally. Herbert Marcus and Arthur Kramer, whose stores were arch-rivals, also vied with one another in their efforts to lure national opera companies to the city: after a dozen years of trying, Kramer rounded up the financial support in 1939 to guarantee a $100,000 payment to the Metropolitan Opera Company if they visited the city, and Marcus, as head of the Dallas Grand

[43] John Bainbridge, *The Super-Americans* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972 [1961]): 146.

Opera Association, made similar arrangements to secure annual visits by the Chicago Civic Opera.[44]

John Rosenfield, who served as resident critic and arts columnist of the *Dallas Morning News* for forty-one years, was a tireless promoter in print and in person of the city's cultural progress. "It is assuredly true," wrote one admirer, "that he is the acknowledged czar of Southwestern culture. . . . [H]e has contrived to establish himself as supreme arbiter in amusement and cultural circles in this region. There are hundreds of people who hesitate to offer comment on concerts and plays until they have read 'Rosenfield' the next morning."[45] When the city's symphony orchestra folded in 1942, Rosenfield immediately began trumpeting the need for resuscitation in his regular arts column. He enlisted the support of Stanley Marcus and other business leaders to raise funds, and in late 1945 the new Dallas Symphony premiered at Fair Park. Rosenfield also helped establish local theatrical companies and was instrumental in creating the Dallas Civic Opera. The visibility of Jewish patrons like Rosenfield, Kramer, and the Marcuses led to a general impression that cultural life in Dallas was the private province of Jews: "A question for discussion at the September 30, 1966 meeting of the Panel of American Women," writes Marilynn Wood Hill in her study of Jewish community involvement in Dallas, "was 'Why are Jews the cultural leaders of Dallas?' rather than 'Are Jews the cultural leaders of Dallas?'" Hill also quotes

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[44] David Ritz, "Inside the Jewish Establishment," *D, The Magazine of Dallas* 2 (November 1975): 108; Dorothy Jacobus, "Growing Up in Dallas" (1977): 2, TJHS Box 3A170, Folder 3; Bainbridge, 142.

[45] Garland Cullum, "The Rosenfield Legend," *Southwest Review* 32 (Autumn 1947): 378-79.

Rosenfield's own assertion that "without the Jew, there wouldn't be any culture in Dallas." [46]

John Rosenfield, however, also provides the clearest evidence that Jews readily acquiesced to racial segregation in Dallas, even where it affected their beloved arts. In 1961, the Metropolitan Opera of New York announced that it could no longer appear at the Music Hall on the Dallas Fairgrounds because the seating there was racially segregated. Rather than acknowledge the condition and make an effort to correct it, Rosenfield angrily denied that the Music Hall was segregated. If blacks were sitting only in the back of the auditorium, he said, it was not because of their race but because they had been inadequate supporters of the arts. "Negro interest in high-priced events never has been rampant," he observed. "If the interests of the cultured Negro . . . are genuine to the extent of wanting to hear the best opera from a very good seat, one could tell him how to go about it," Rosenfield wrote. He expected, though, that the suggestion that African Americans wanted to attend the opera was "a new idea, inspired more to 'test' segregation than to patronize the arts": Where, after all, were blacks "when civic leaders were scrounging for financial guarantees in the effort to develop the city?"[47] As Jim Schutze has made plain, Rosenfield here revealed a total disregard for the social and economic conditions of African Americans in Dallas. Where were they when money for the arts was being raised? "[P]robably scrounging for food and shelter," Schutze writes, "scrounging to get through high

[46] Marilynn Wood Hill, "A History of the Jewish Involvement in the Dallas Community" (Master's Thesis, Southern Methodist University, 1967): 120n.105, 119-120.
[47] Quoted in Schutze, 97.

school, to avoid starvation and typhus in West Dallas, to go to college and hope one day to hear some good opera."[48]

At the same time that Rosenfield was writing such misinformed opinions, other Dallas Jews were acquiescing to the conditions of segregation. On the Dallas Citizens Council, gradualism had long been the order of the day. When, in 1950, bombers dynamited South Dallas houses where African American families, new to the recently all-white neighborhood, were sleeping, the Council worked alongside law enforcement to push for indictments. They were not especially interested in racial justice – many black families had moved into South Dallas only after some of these same businessmen had forced them out of their previous homes in order to develop their old neighborhoods – but wanted to maintain the appearance of social order and tranquility. On the verge of the Sunbelt bonanza, the Dallas Citizens Council did not wish racial violence to discredit their city or to discourage investment in it. When the District Attorney formed a biracial grand jury to help investigate the attacks, its entire white membership, including Julius Schepps, were members of the Dallas Citizens Council.[49] When the grand jury completed its work, it had made a few convictions possible, but jurors conspicuously refused to follow the source of the crimes deep into the white community of South Dallas. They reported that the defendants were only the tip of the iceberg, that further investigation might reveal that "lay and religious and community groups" were also involved, but they asked to be discharged before

[48] Schutze, 97.
[49] Schutze, 7.

such an investigation could occur.[50] The goal, clearly, was to soothe the immediate racial tension and to stop the bombings, not to seek true justice for the victims.

Even after the Supreme Court issued its 1954 decision in *Brown v. the Board of Education*, ordering school integration and providing a moral basis for desegregation of all kinds, Dallas leaders, including Jews, were resolutely irresolute. In response to the decision, the *Dallas Morning News*, closely aligned with the Citizens Council in all matters, urged a new strategy which Jim Schutze summarized as "go along with legal desegregation, obey the letter of the law, wait, be calm, do nothing that would disturb commerce or the peace of the city, and then find new and informal ways to maintain actual and total separation of the races." This, the *News* felt, was probably the Court's intention anyway.[51] The Texas State Fair, which was firmly under the control of Dallas business leaders, provided one staging ground for this strategy. Before 1953, the annual exhibition was a whites-only affair except on "Negro Achievement Day," an appropriately Orwellian name for the one day each year when blacks were allowed to do their part to make the Citizens Council richer. Under pressure from the NAACP and other black groups, State Fair officials agreed to permit black attendance every day – but to maintain segregation of the midway rides and food services. When the NAACP convinced the Dallas Negro Chamber of Commerce to withdraw its support for the Fair, Mayor Thornton agreed to desegregate a few more attractions but declared firmly that selected rides – specifically those that might cause

[50] Quoted in Schutze, 70.
[51] Schutze, 105.

physical contact between riders – would remain off-limits to blacks. Despite Thornton's perverse insistence that the Fair was not segregated, agricultural and homemaking competitions remained racially separate for more than a decade.[52]

Dallas's civic leadership took a similar foot-dragging approach in integrating the public schools: they only acceded to the requirements of the *Brown* decision in 1961, after physically turning black children away at schoolhouse doors and after exhausting every judicial avenue for appeal. By then, other Southern cities had demonstrated the possible disastrous outcomes of massive resistance. In 1956, southeast of Fort Worth in Mansfield, hundreds of white protesters, with the support of police, surrounded the city's high school to prevent black students from entering. Protesters hung blacks in effigy, fought with observers, and stopped cars at the city limits to prevent civil-rights advocates from entering. Governor Allan Shivers, a defender of segregation and state's rights, proclaimed the demonstration an orderly protest and sent Texas Rangers to uphold the state's segregation laws in clear violation of a federal court order.[53] And in 1957, President Eisenhower ordered federal troops to Little Rock, Arkansas, to subdue angry white mobs and to protect black students trying to attend the public high school. With such possibilities in the offing, Dallas leaders decided to fold their hand and to accept the inevitable integration of their own schools, at least up to a point – and to do it as quickly and quietly as possible.

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[52] Schutze, 95-96.

[53] "Mansfield School Desegregation Incident," *The Handbook of Texas Online* <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/MM/jcm2.html> [Accessed 16 August 2002].

To that end, powerful Dallas Jews began to mobilize to play a key role in the long effort to desegregate not only the city's public schools but also its arts facilities, public transportation, and shopping centers. As Jim Schutze reveals, "a very specific wing of the Dallas business establishment" was instrumental in persuading the Citizens Council to make this decision: "the merchants, the money men and the brokers" among whom Jews were well-represented.[54] These men, after all – more so than the land developers, investors, and corporation heads who fleshed out the Citizens Council – had more direct contact with the daily conditions of life in Dallas. They served customers of all classes and all races, and they understood intimately the requirements of selling and building commercial enterprises. They were in a position to see both the big picture of long-term plans and hopes for their city and the little picture of the day-to-day operations of their stores and banks – as well as the delicate filaments that tied the two pictures together. The high representation of Jews in this category put them in a unique position to influence their city's integration policy as it unfolded. It is also likely that Jews were at the forefront of the effort to integrate Dallas because even the most successful and powerful of them had suffered religious discrimination and could bring to the matter of segregation some sensitivity to the feelings of its victims. Julius Schepps, for example, easily the city's most respected Jewish citizen, was forbidden to join its most prestigious golfing club, the Dallas Country Club, or one of its premier social organizations, the Petroleum

[54] Schutze, 119.

Club; in response to such slights, he refused to attend social functions at either, even when invited by a member.[55]

Texas Jewish merchants had long been ambivalent about their complicity in the segregation system. Leon Harris writes that even as Jewish merchants embraced segregation willingly, they "often had a bad conscience about refusing to serve blacks except in segregated areas of the store."[56] When civil rights protests and demonstrations began, Jewish storeowners were among the first to face sit-ins and boycotts, and to their credit, once the initial protests were quieted, they were among the first owners to acquiesce to court orders and protesters' demands: if Harris is right, they may only have been waiting for a reasonable excuse to do what their consciences demanded.

Stanley Marcus has described the speed with which Neiman's and other department stores abolished their racial policies, once a federal court had ruled in September 1961 that Dallas's public schools must integrate. "We all agreed that children should not be the first to meet desegregation," he wrote, "but that the

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[55] See, for example, Mrs. George Golman, Interview with Robert Cullum, in "Interviews with Various Associates of Julius Schepps," Julius Schepps Papers, AJA Small Collection 10825; Julius Schepps to Mr. and Mrs. James F. Chambers, Jr. (24 September 1965), Schepps Papers; David Ritz reports a story that Schepps, a great *raconteur*, was fond of telling: "Y'all know, of course, that I ain't the best golfer in the state, but then again, I ain't the worst. And, well, so many of my good friends belong to that high class Dallas Country Club out there in Highland Park. They're always asking me to go out and play with 'em. So last week I went on out and spent the whole afternoon chasing that little white ball from here to hell and back. Don't want to tell you what I shot, but I'm not sure whether the final score had two digits in it or three. Anyways, we're sitting around the club house and someone says to me, "Julius, how come you don't join the club?" "Fine idea there, pal," I reply, "why don't you run upstairs to the office and fetch me a membership application?" "Be happy to, Julius," my golfing buddy says. So he scoots out of the club house and goes to get me that application. And that, dear friends and neighbors, is one gent I haven't heard from since. To this day, I'm still waiting for him to come back with the application." Ritz, 109.

[56] Harris, 127.

adult community needed to desegregate itself beforehand." Marcus issued an "executive decision" ordering his salespeople to cease discriminatory sales practices and to open employment immediately to black applicants. Concerned that the store's staff would not go gently, Marcus arranged training meetings "to break through generations of prejudice, to give us confidence that black customers would be served in our stores well and graciously." Several white customers canceled their charge accounts rather than buy from black salespeople, but (in a dramatic illustration of the prestige of the Neiman-Marcus label) they soon re-opened their accounts.[57] Neiman's elegant restaurant, the Zodiac Room, was also one of the first fine restaurants in the city to open its doors to African-American diners.[58] In smaller cities, Jewish-owned stores like the Popular Store in El Paso and Lichtenstein's in Corpus Christi were the first in their cities to employ black salespeople and to end the unequal treatment of black customers.[59]

The relative ease with which merchants integrated their stores demonstrated that change was possible, that white Dallasites could accept desegregation with equanimity, and other examples soon followed. In April of 1956, as the Montgomery Bus Boycott dragged on in Alabama, Dallas integrated its public transportation with virtually no fuss or animosity. Literally in the course of a single overnight shift, transit workers removed the signs designating White and Colored sections: the next morning, the buses went out into the city,

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[57] Marcus, 368-69.
[58] Craig Hines, "American wonder in the heart of Texas," *Houston Chronicle* (26 January 2002).
[59] Floyd S. Fierman, *The Schwartz Family of El Paso: The Story of a Pioneer Jewish Family in the Southwest* (El Paso: University of Texas at El Paso Texas Western Press, 1980): 48; Hollace Ava Weiner, "Rabbi Sidney Wolf: Harmonizing in Texas," in Bauman and Kalin, 130.

riders boarded them as always, and the day passed without incident. "As it turned out," Stanley Marcus later remarked, "the people of Dallas were way ahead of their leaders, as they usually are."[60] The merchants, more directly involved with the people than most of the city's powerful figures, understood that fact and used it to advantage.

In 1961, a group of Dallas merchants, including Stanley Marcus, recommended a public relations campaign to pave the way for rapid desegregation, and they hired Sam Bloom, head of one of the city's leading advertising agencies, to direct it. The purpose of the media blitz, Bloom later explained, was to create an atmosphere in which citizens could "get up and advocate for [desegregation] without being . . . politically shot down or ostracized in the community."[61] Bloom produced a twenty-minute documentary film, *Dallas at the Crossroads*, which presented the racial situation in stark terms. Bloom's film was a masterpiece of propaganda aimed directly at the city's white population. Not a single African-American person appeared in the film, nor did Bloom take it to the black population for viewing. Under the direction of the Citizens Council, it was screened all over the city to neighborhood groups, schools, churches, and company employees. The message was clear: there would be no racial violence in Dallas.

The film begins by presenting images of Dallas as a demi-paradise, "the finest home on earth to raise a family," then travels to Little Rock and New

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[60] Quoted in Schutze, 106.

[61] Interview with Sam Bloom by Joan Loeb and Gerry Cristol (26 March 1974), quoted in Gerry Cristol, *A Light in the Prairie* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1998): 187.

Orleans to show scenes of recent racial violence. "This is the face of man-made destruction," explains the narrator, Walter Cronkite, over images of angry whites from those *other* cities shouting, gesturing furiously, reaching out to attack. A black-suited judge looks into the camera and tells the viewers that desegregation in Dallas is a court-ordered inevitability and that they should accept it gracefully: "Disagreement or dissatisfaction with any law should not and it must not be expressed by citizens in violence." Other authority figures, including law professors, preachers, the mayor and the publishers of the city's two daily newspapers, insist that Dallasites must be good citizens, moral and gracious human beings, law-abiding and nonviolent in their protests. The police chief promises to arrest "those few who do not have the character and judgment to obey the law," and at the close of the film the National Anthem plays over images of babies, Boy Scouts, and flag-carrying paraders.[62]

Through efforts like this, Dallas's Jewish businessmen promoted racial desegregation from inside the city's business establishment: their message, as in *Dallas at the Crossroads*, was essentially a political and commercial appeal rather than a moral one. At the same time, however, the Jewish clergy, especially in the person of Rabbi Levi Olan of Temple Emanu-El, was making the moral case for integration. Born in the Ukraine, Olan grew up in Rochester, New York, in an Orthodox, Yiddish-speaking home. He developed an early passion for scholarship, language and learning, an urge to question authority which later drew him away from the traditional Judaism of his childhood toward Reform. He

[62] I was unable to obtain a copy of the film, so I have relied on Jim Schutze's summary of it. Schutze, 129-133.

entered Hebrew Union College in 1923, completed his rabbinical training in 1929, and served a Reform congregation in Worcester, Massachusetts, for twenty years, earning a reputation as an outspoken political liberal and advocate of the social component of Judaism. "I was a liberal economically and politically," Olan later explained in an interview. "Of course, I had one rule: that is that I always preached the social message . . . from a Jewish religious point of view."[63] When representatives of Temple Emanu-El, more impressed with the rabbi's learnedness than worried about his politics, approached him in 1948, Olan had some hesitation about accepting a pulpit in a region so famously conservative and so dominated by fundamentalist Christianity. "You won't last a day," one friend advised him. "If you get up and spout some of your things you'll be out on your ear."[64] Olan was unsure, as well, that he would fit in a city so untouched by Jewish culture as he understood it: on an earlier visit he had asked Rabbi Lefkowitz where he should go in Dallas for a good bagel, to which Lefkowitz replied, "What's a bagel?"[65]

In the end, though, Olan took the advice of other friends who assured him that not only could he survive in Dallas, but that he would have a unique opportunity to be an ambassador of Jewish culture and social values to a region on the verge of blossoming, and he accepted that challenge with relish. "My answer to [the naysayers]," he later told an interviewer, "was 'It's very easy to stand for [liberal] things in New England. . . . The real place to stand for them is where they

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[63] Levi Olan, *Levi Olan: Oral History Interviews Conducted by Gerald D. Saxon on February 4 and April 6, 1983* (Dallas: Dallas Public Library, 1983): 16-17.
[64] Levi Olan interviews (1972, 1974), quoted in Cristol, 156.
[65] Ritz, 111.

are challenged, and if you're really going to do anything about them, that is the place to do it."[66] Along with his pulpit at Emanu-El, Olan took over from the retiring Rabbi Lefkowitz a weekly radio program which quickly became Olan's own. These radio addresses, later televised, won Olan fame and respect in the city's gentile community as well as among its Jews: "He is the best preacher in Dallas," claimed one Baptist Sunday School teacher.[67] His sermons were straightforward in their message but erudite and thoughtful in their substance and argument. "[I]n his more fiery and extravagant sermons," wrote journalist David Ritz, "he might drop as many as many as 40 or 50 names – Kafka, Malraux, Tillich, Tolstoy, Faulkner, Spinoza, Sartre, de Tocqueville, Cardinal Newman – sending your poor mind reeling, taking your breath away. He was an Old Testament prophet, a consummate performer, with substance and clarity at the base."[68] In addition to his service at the Temple and regular radio and television addresses, Olan later performed as a professor at Southern Methodist University's Perkins School of Theology.

"I was a kind of person who didn't hem and haw," Olan said later. Indeed, his eagerness to use the radio to challenge the status quo, and his recognition that racial segregation was one of the major problems plaguing his new home, were both apparent in one of his first broadcast sermons. Olan was dismayed, as a newcomer, on seeing signs proclaiming "for whites only" on public rest rooms.

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[66] Derro Evans, "Rabbi Levi Olan: A Conversation," *Sunday Magazine, Dallas Times Herald* (11 October 1970) and James Street, "Dazzling Dallas," *Holiday* (March 1953): 102-119, quoted in Hollace Ava Weiner, *Jewish Stars in Texas: Rabbis and Their Work* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1999): 219-220.
[67] Adolphus Cummings, Letter to the Editor, *Dallas Morning News* (8 November 1984), quoted in Cristol, 184.
[68] Ritz, 111.

"[T]hat got me," he said. "So I preached a sermon on the radio on the race issue." The response was largely hostile. "My phone rang that afternoon. Someone says to me, 'Go back where you came from.'"[69] Olan continued raising the issue throughout the 1950s, however, taking pains to place it in a moral context that demonstrated its urgency and importance. Three years after the 1954 *Brown* decision, with Dallas schools still unintegrated, he told his radio audience:

> Segregation is immoral. It is immoral to say to any person, regardless of the color of his skin or the church of his faith, that he cannot sit where I sit, eat at my table, study in the same school as my children, apply for the job of work as I do. The question is not whether segregation shall continue but whether we shall voluntarily do what is right or be forced by experiences painful and damaging?[70]

Olan elaborated this point in a 1959 letter in which he explained that the "moral issue from my point of view is a clear one, segregation is a vestige of slavery, and is highly immoral. No one who believes in one God can believe in discrimination amongst His children."[71]

Olan was frequently described as the "conscience of Dallas," and he regularly spoke out with conviction on issues that made many of his listeners cringe. After the 1963 assassination of John F. Kennedy, with many Dallasites worried that the nation would blame them for the tragedy, Olan told his congregation that the city was, in fact, at fault. Dallasites had been silent in the face of degrading jokes and vicious insults directed at the president and his administration; they had silently accepted the word of those who unreasonably

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[69] Levi Olan, *Oral History Interviews*, 16.
[70] Levi Olan, WFAA radio broadcast reprinted in *The Texas Observer* (7 June 1957), quoted in Cristol, 186.
[71] Quoted in Ritz, 111.

labeled Kennedy a traitor and a communist agent; they were guilty along with "the deranged sick soul that fired the gun." Even those "who could never assassinate" had helped to "[create] the passionate hatred which does."[72]

Four and a half years later, Olan used the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. to warn his radio listeners that "we seem to be a very violent nation" that exists in "a moral universe" in which retribution would surely result. The only solution was for whites to overcome their prejudices and recognize the fundamental unity of human beings: "More important than anything else in the world today," he said, "is the recognition, the acceptance, and the living by the basic natural fact that humanity is one. . . . [Racial discrimination] is both immoral and blasphemous." He also took the opportunity to criticize the war in Vietnam, placing it in the same moral context. "Can we go on dropping Napalm on little children and burn them alive and not pay a price for doing it!" he exclaimed. "Can we reduce the houses of innocent people to rubble and escape the penalty. If this is a moral universe, we shall pay a bitter price."[73] Years later, Olan claimed that such comments made him unpopular with members of his congregation and with non-Jews. "Did you receive a lot of flack from taking a stand like that?" asked an interviewer in 1983. "That's an understatement," Olan responded.[74]

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[72] Levi A. Olan, "In Memoriam – President John F. Kennedy," Notes for Address (25 November 1963), Levi Olan Papers, AJA Manuscript Collection 181.
[73] Levi A. Olan, "From Birmingham to Memphis" (28 April 1968), Levi Olan Papers, AJA Manuscript Collection 181.
[74] Olan, *Oral History Interviews*, 30-31.

In addition to goading his listeners with speeches and sermons, Olan directed his congregants at Emanu-El into concrete action to benefit minority communities in the city. After the rabbi's admonishment that a religious congregation "should have a concern for the welfare of human beings" and should find a way to put their benevolent feelings into action, the newly appointed community affairs committee, led by Hortense Sanger and Billie Stern, recommended that the temple should "develop a pre-school for disadvantaged children, providing skilled professional leadership and adequate equipment, in a [suitable] neighborhood." [75] Rabbi Olan appealed to the congregation for funds and quickly raised 60% of the necessary $25,000. Temple members also volunteered time preparing the facility at the Rhoads Terrace Housing Project, and the school opened in September 1965 with twenty-nine students aged four and five and a staff of professional teachers. About 100 women from the temple prepared and served lunches, escorted the children on weekly field trips, and assisted in the classrooms.[76] Using the Rhoads Terrace school as a model, Rabbi Olan urged the Dallas school board to institute public kindergartens, which at that point did not exist in the city, "in those areas of the community where the need for them is most acute, and where parents cannot afford tuition in such private institutions as already exist and thrive in the more prosperous areas of the city." Only in 1971 did the school board finally do so.[77]

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[75] Temple Emanu-El Board Minutes (29 January 1963), quoted in Cristol, 190; Report of the Temple Emanu-El Pre-School Project (23 November 1965), quoted in Cristol, 191.
[76] Cristol, 191-92.
[77] Quoted in Cristol, 192.

Olan was hardly alone among Texas rabbis in promoting a moral, even a prophetic approach to the civil rights struggle, nor was he the only one to recognize that such a view should be supported with action. In Houston, Rabbi Moshe Cahana of Congregation Brith Shalom spoke regularly about the need to improve race relations, and after a visit to Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963 he helped to organize the Houston and Harris County Conference on Religion and Race Relations, an interfaith clerical committee. "Religion has always had something to say about the moral questions of society," Cahana told the group at Christ Church Cathedral in Houston in June, 1963, where he was the first speaker on the program. "Religion is the best instrument to shed light on the social questions of each generation. Why then does not the pulpit identify itself openly and actively with the Negro fight for justice, equality and decent relations?" Cahana invoked the names of biblical prophets – as well as that of Jesus – to make his case that people of every faith share the responsibility for racism. "Segregation and prejudice are not God's will and the scriptures condemn them," he said. "It is a sin, and the time has come to stop sinning. The time has come to confess and repent."[78] The Reverend Thomas Griffin of the University Christian Church seconded Cahana's comments, noting that black resentment toward churches over clerical inaction was growing and that "[t]he feeling of the Negro is not limited to the Christian church" but that many "are appalled by the gap between the basic teachings of Judaism and the practice of the business world."[79]

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[78] Moshe Cahana, "Confession and Repentance," Address to Metropolitian Houston Conference on Race and Religion (25 June 1963), in Proceedings of the Steering Committee, AJA Small Collection 2850.
[79] Ibid.

Representatives of several other Protestant and Catholic churches rose to make similar addresses. The conspicuously interdenominational language evident at the Christ Church Cathedral meeting emphasizes not only the mission of the Conference but the fact that Cahana was part of a constellation of people and faiths which he hoped could unite in common cause.

In San Antonio, Rabbi David Jacobson promoted integration and fair treatment of blacks and Mexican-Americans. As Karl Preuss has shown, Jacobson took an early role in advancing race relations as a member of the public library's board of directors, where he supported the 1949 desegregation of the city's libraries. He attended fundraisers for Henry B. Gonzales, a city councilman and later U.S. Congressman who was the city's most prominent activist for Mexican-American equality as well as for all racial desegregation. [80] He invited black clergymen to speak from his pulpit at Temple Beth-El and to visit him at his home.[81] In March of 1960, with other clergymen, Jacobson met with San Antonio businessmen to begin discussions about desegregating their stores and restaurants: all except Joske's agreed to do so peacefully and immediately rather than face imminent NAACP-led protests. "The role that Rabbi Jacobson played in these deliberations was that of bridge-builder," Preuss says. "Jacobson was a mediator. . . . He sought accommodation and compromise without sacrifice of principle."[82] After the successful integration of the city's lunch counters – to which Joske's capitulated after three months – Jacobson began a series of personal visits to

[80] Preuss, 140.
[81] Preuss, 142. This information comes from interviews with the rabbi's wife, Helen Jacobson, who apparently did not provide dates on which they occurred.
[82] Preuss, 146.

restaurants around the city to urge them to integrate their facilities. Sometimes arriving alone and explaining to the manager "that the moral thing to do was to integrate," other times arriving with a black friend, taking seats, and insisting on being served, Jacobson put on the pressure in a firm but friendly way. "He believed," Preuss writes, "that his prominence in the community as a rabbi gave him the moral authority that an ordinary layperson would have lacked."[83] By February of 1962, some thirteen restaurants had opened their doors to black customers, and Jacobson had been personally involved in integrating at least four of them. Jacobson recalled later that a top official of the Luby's Cafeteria chain, which the rabbi had helped integrate in San Antonio, thanked him for making him do what he knew he should: "I didn't want to [open the restaurant to blacks]," Jacobson quoted him saying, "but I've discovered how right you were, and we should have done it on our own long ago."[84]

Outside the larger Texas cities, however, where Jews did not enjoy the same degree of status and political influence, their approach to matters of race was more conservative. Rabbi Milton Rosenbaum, a native New Yorker who served at Beth-El Congregation in Fort Worth from 1949 to 1956, provides a useful summary of the social and racial attitudes of his congregants. He noted, first of all, that the Jewish community itself was insular: "[M]any people there were related to each other," and so "there seemed little room for newcomers to Fort Worth [and] many newcomers found the community cold. You were either

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[83] Preuss, 149.

[84] "Jacobsons Aim to Defeat Bigotry," *San Antonio Express-News* (16 February 1989), quoted in Preuss, 149-150.

socially 'in' or 'out.' Probably because of my position, Thelma and I were generally 'in' and found the community most hospitable."[85] The opinions Fort Worth Jews expressed about race were especially troubling to the rabbi. "I regarded myself as a middle of the road liberal but felt strongly about the indecency of racial prejudice," he wrote in a memoir. "For some in my congregation that marked me as a radical, especially when I explained that since things would inevitably change, they might have a hard time in later years justifying their current attitudes to their children." With time, Rosenbaum discovered that the "racial attitudes of Texas Jews were . . . more complicated than they first appeared." He distinguished between public and private opinions. "Publicly," he observed, "there was a strong urge to be approved by non-Jewish neighbors. Therefore, I learned, many Jews publicly expressed the same biases that they thought their neighbors held." In their private relations with black individuals, however, Rosenbaum noticed that "their relationships were far more personal and less socially distant than those of Jews in the North toward African Americans." Indeed, when the Civil Rights Movement altered the legal landscape, opening doors to black Texans, "Texas Jews particularly often accepted them more readily than did their Northern counterparts. To me, these changes in attitude and behavior shown by Texas Jews were an antidote to my earlier Northern smugness and sense of moral superiority."[86] Not only were Texas Jews, then, more readily accepting of black equality than other Texans,

[85] Milton Rosenbaum, "Remembering Fort Worth," 2-3, TJHS Box 3A171, Folder 2.
[86] Rosenbaum, 5-6.

they also showed a greater willingness to accommodate to change than Northern Jews.

Rosenbaum's observations underscore the unique position of Texas Jews in relation to other Texans and other Jews. In their relations with black individuals in social settings, during guest sermons, or as customers, they could be friendly, personable and fully accepting. In public discourse, however, they accepted the norms of the communities in which they lived. Like Rabbi Rosenbaum among Fort Worth's Jews, Texas Jews were simultaneously in and out, not "true Texans" but accepted by virtue of their social and economic standing and thus able to exercise influence. As the example of Dallas Jewry demonstrates, Jewish Texans were able to convert this quasi-insider status – they were white, they were wealthy – into progressive social action, often pushing their communities to accept changes that were inevitable and, in the long run, in everyone's best interest.

Chapter 9. Still in a Wilderness: Imagined Frontiers in Works of Texas Jewish Fiction

The City of Austin, Texas, grew tremendously in the 1990s, about 41% according to the U.S. Census, largely because of Austin's dynamic high-tech industry led by Dell Computer.[1] "Thirty-five thousand people, the equivalent of a fair-sized town, moved here last year alone," wrote a *New York Times* reporter from Austin in 2000. "And in the last five years, Austin has produced or acquired 17,000 new millionaires." In addition to the business opportunities such a climate afforded, newcomers were drawn to the city's vaunted quality of life: "With its bars, bands and barbecue joints, its lakes, parks, low crime and temperate winters," the *Times* reporter wrote, "Austin is a lifestyle mecca that attracts all kinds."[2] Quality of life, however, is not the same for everyone. In 1995, IBM decided to transfer about 900 employees from Boca Raton, Florida, to Austin, raising serious concerns for many of the approximately 150 Jewish families whom the company asked to relocate. Boca Raton, as the *Austin American-Statesman* reported, had more than 116,000 Jewish residents who constituted 16% of the city's population. It had eighteen synagogues; fourteen Jewish day schools and child-care centers; a selection of kosher markets and restaurants; and public schools that closed on major Jewish holidays. Austin, by contrast, had only 6,000 Jews, representing a little more than 1% of the city's population; two synagogues

[1] In 1990, Austin had a population of 465,622, which grew to 656,562 by 2000. U.S. Census as reported in *The World Almanac and Book of Facts, 2003* (New York: World Almanac Books, 2003): 403.

[2] Helen Thorpe, "Austin, We Have a Problem," *New York Times* (20 August 2000).

(neither of them Orthodox); two small Jewish day-care centers; and no Jewish schools or kosher food stores. IBM's Jewish employees worried about the lack of an Orthodox synagogue, about the distances between residential neighborhoods and the synagogues, and about the lack of educational facilities for their children. "You meet people here who have never met a Jew or don't know they have," said a representative of the Jewish Federation of Austin. "That will be strange to them."[3]

The IBM transferees were part of an influx of Jews to Austin that nearly tripled the city's Jewish population from about 5,000 in 1990 to 13,500 in 2000.[4] Congregation Beth Israel, the city's oldest and largest Reform temple, almost doubled in size from 400 member families in 1991 to more than 700, straining available facilities and forcing the Sunday School to hold classes "in every available space: the rabbi's office, the chandeliered boardroom, even the bride's and groom's dressing rooms."[5] The growth did, however, provide the impetus and the means to form new Jewish institutions in Austin. New synagogues like Kol Halev, an independent, nondenominational congregation with more than 180 member families, have formed in the city to accommodate a growing diversity of denominational wishes.[6] Austin annually hosts both a Jewish Book Fair and a Jewish Film Festival. In 1998, an Austin grocery store opened a fresh kosher

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[3] Juan R. Palomo and Stephen Pounds, " Dearth of Jewish amenities worries IBM transferees; Floridians accustomed to Jewish day schools, kosher butchers, more congregations," *Austin American-Statesman* (20 November 1995).

[4] *American Jewish Yearbook*.

[5] Congregation Beth Israel Homepage <www.bethisrael.org> [Accessed 9 March 2003]; Starita Smith, "Jewish congregations consider Dell campus 'Wonderful' – problem of growth leaves groups in need of more space," *Austin American-Statesman* (27 May 1997).

[6] Eileen E. Flynn, "Channukah Holds Special Meaning for Congregation," *Austin American-Statesman* (29 November 2002).

meat market and café offering a variety of kosher foods – if not, as a newspaper writer noted glumly, the "vats of pickled herring, specialty sandwiches paying tribute to notable personalities, [and] barrels for pickle fishing" that she expected of "a true deli."[7] A Jewish day school providing a full religious and secular curriculum opened in 2000 on the new forty-acre campus of the Dell Jewish Community Center, which also houses the Conservative synagogue, Agudas Achim. The DJCC, named for Michael Dell, the facility's largest patron and probably the state's most famous Jewish citizen, provides a wealth of activities and programs for Jews and non-Jews: during the 2000 presidential campaign, Governor George W. Bush rented the DJCC for a number of public events, running into trouble only when his campaign wanted to celebrate their Super Tuesday primary victories by feeding the press corps a pork barbecue, which the Center refused to allow on the premises.[8]

The growth in Austin's Jewish community suggests the degree to which Texas and its major cities are no longer peripheral Jewish communities. More Jews live in Texas today than in Michigan, Georgia, Virginia or Missouri, and Houston and Dallas each have larger Jewish communities than Pittsburgh, Seattle, Buffalo, or Cincinnati.[9] Limits on the ability to lead a full, rich and devoutly

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[7] Ronna N. Welch, "Casual Kosher," *Austin Chronicle* (6 February 1998).

[8] Max Garrone and Anthony York, "Republicans rebuff Bush," *Salon* <http://archive.salon.com/politics2000/feature/2000/03/16/trail_mix> [Accessed 10 March 2003]. Michael Dell provided both the land and significant start-up funds for the DJCC and remains a generous patron of the city's Jewish community. The Center aroused a great deal of controversy, revolving particularly around the size of the development in a city with strong anti-development and environmentalist constituencies. See, for example, Mike Clark-Madison, "The Promised Land: Jews and Neighbors Lay Competing Claims," *Austin Chronicle* (6 March 1998).

[9] *American Jewish Yearbook*. As of 2000, Houston had a Jewish population of 42,000 and Dallas of 45,000. Pittsburgh had 40,000, Seattle 37,200, Buffalo 20,000, and Cincinnati 22,500.

Jewish life in Texas have steadily disappeared. State law excuses Jewish public school students from class on religious holidays. Thousands of Soviet and Russian Jews have made their homes in Texas cities, and Texas Jews have served as national chairpeople of all of the nation's most important Jewish organizations, eroding the provincialism that once characterized Texas Jewry. Untold numbers of Jewish Texans visit Israel every year – many Jews living in Texas are, in fact, Israelis – and the Anti-Defamation League regularly flies Texas congressmen to Israel to help assure their political support. Local Jewish historical societies exist in several cities, and the Texas Jewish Historical Society, founded in 1980, has more than 750 member families. Jewish community centers thrive in all of the state's major cities. There are Lubavitchers in Houston, bagel shops in Abilene, and a Holocaust Museum in El Paso.

Texas Jewry today, in other words, is a modern, urban, self-conscious, socially active and spiritually rich community. The material frontier, the geographic distance that once isolated Jewish Texans and prevented them from participating in the Jewish life of the nation and the world, is a distant memory. Nevertheless, the *imaginary* frontier, the conceptual boundaries that distinguish Jews in Texas from those everywhere else, is alive and well. The idea that Texas Jews exist along an imaginary line separating them from other Jews remains an integral part of how they describe (and allow others to describe) their condition. When visiting the East Coast, for example, *Texas Monthly* writer Mimi Swartz claims that she still hears the question, "Are there any Jews in Texas?"[10] A

[10] Mimi Swartz, "The Promised Land," *Texas Monthly* (April 1994): 109.

respondent to an on-line Jewish culture newsgroup warned a writer whose employer was relocating him to Abilene that he was "headed to the heart of Christian Texas" and should contact the Chabad-Lubavitch organization, "who do a pretty good job of giving support to Jews who find themselves way out in the 'wilderness.'"[11]

Larger communities than Abilene are apt to be similarly described. At the Hillel Center of the University of Texas at Austin, which serves a university Jewish community of about 4,000 students and faculty, English professor Adam Newton, a Bronx native, said his work at Hillel helped him feel "somewhat less 'bamidbared,'" Hebrew for "in the wilderness."[12] And the view that Texas is an unusual climate for Jews reaches far beyond the state itself. In 1986, while waiting for papers that would allow them to complete their migration from the Soviet Union to the United States, Phil Vinokur and his parents received an invitation to join the Jewish community of Waco. "Most of our coimmigrants went to New York, Chicago, but not Waco, Texas," Vinokur remembered. "Yet, after our most reliable source of information declared that Waco was a small agricultural community with cowboys and Indians . . . I was excited."[13] Similarly, when the Dyatlovitsky family decided to leave Moscow for Dallas in 1989, they

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[11] removememory@cts.com (Randy B.) post to Usenet group "soc.culture.jewish" (11 December 1997), in response to post by slyles4345@aol.com (SLyles4345) (11 December 1997) [Accessed 10 October 1998].

[12] Nathan Levy, "Seeking Unity In The Age Of Diversity; University of Texas Jewish students and professors lament a missing sense of unity," *Austin American-Statesman* (12 May 1996).

[13] Phil Vinokur, speech at Temple Rodef Sholom, Waco, Texas (4 April 1986), in "Correspondence and minutes of the Waco Jewish Texas Sesquicentennial Committee, 1985-1987, plus biographical information, documents, and reminiscences of founding members of the Waco Jewish community, 1837-1987." AJA Small Collections.

committed themselves to "a place where they knew only that a president had been killed, that the weather was hot and that there were cowboys."[14]

Some of these perceptions may derive from the fact that the Jewish community of Texas, even as it continues to grow and develop, still lags far behind similar states in terms of Jewish population and institutions; Jews remain less than 1% of the Texas population, whereas they comprise much larger proportions in states of comparable size. Texas ranks second among the states in general population but has only the tenth largest Jewish population (See Table 14). Massachusetts, with a fraction of Texas's total population, has more than twice the number of Jews.[15] Houston, Dallas-Fort Worth, San Antonio, and Austin have grown significantly and contain more complex Jewish communities than they did a decade ago, but they are still far from the incomparably Jewish urban centers of New York and South Florida. While their smaller population has not prevented Texas Jews from establishing and maintaining the facilities necessary for meaningful Jewish religious and communal life, it has effectively marginalized them: whatever their institutional richness, Texas Jewry remains a small island in a vast Christian sea and still seems strange and far away in comparison to other American communities.

For a supposedly small and remote community, Texas Jewry is the subject of a surprising wealth of literary works in several genres: no fewer than seven

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[14] Karen M. Thomas, "A new American family: Russian grandmother clings to old-world traditions as grandsons plunge into the mainstream," *Dallas Morning News* (3 November 1995).
[15] According to the *American Jewish Yearbook*, Massachusetts has a general population of 6,349,000 and a Jewish population of 275,000. Texas, in contrast, has 20,852,000 people, of whom 128,000 are Jews.

Table 14. Jewish Population of the Ten Most Populous States, with Rankings, 2000.

State	Population		Jewish % of Total	Rank Among States	
	General	Jewish		General Pop.	Jewish Pop.*
California	33,871,648	994,000	2.9%	1	2
Texas	20,851,820	128,000	0.6%	2	10
New York	18,976,457	1,653,000	8.7%	3	1
Florida	15,982,378	628,000	3.9%	4	3
Illinois	12,419,293	270,000	2.2%	5	7
Pennsylvania	12,281,054	283,000	2.3%	6	5
Ohio	11,353,140	142,000	1.3%	7	9
Michigan	9,938,444	110,000	1.1%	8	11
New Jersey	8,414,350	468,000	5.6%	9	4
Georgia	8,186,453	93,500	1.1%	10	13

Sources: For general population figures, U.S. Census as reported in *The World Almanac and Book of Facts, 2003* (New York: World Almanac Books, 2003): 399; for Jewish population figures, *American Jewish Yearbook*.

* The ten states with the highest Jewish populations are: New York, California, Florida, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts (275,000), Illinois, Maryland (216,000), Ohio, and Texas.

novels for children or young readers; two adult novels; two stage plays; two series of crime novels comprising together nearly twenty-five volumes; and a work of apocalyptic science fiction.[16] Significantly, the imagined boundaries that separate Jews from non-Jews and that separate Texas from the centers of American and Jewish life are an important theme in every one of these books and the central theme in many of them. In all of these works, Texas Jews appear as people struggling to find a place for themselves and to define themselves in the context

[16] I have omitted from this count non-fictional works of memoir and autobiography, as well as creative works by Texas Jews that do not explore themes having to do with Texas-Jewish life, such as the poems of Fania Kruger, a Russian-Jewish immigrant who lived in Wichita Falls and Austin. Kruger's books include *The Tenth Jew* (Dallas: Kaleidograph Press, 1949) and *Selected Poems* (Austin: Benchmark Books, 1973).

of non-Jewish Others; they are marginal characters whose peculiar combination of identities gives them special status and, in some cases, special insight; they are people whose Jewishness makes them strange as Texans and whose "Texanness" makes them strange as Jews. Conscious of the geographical and conceptual distances that separate them from "real" Jews and from "real" Texans, they struggle to close those gaps while maintaining their religious authenticity and personal integrity.

Few of the protagonists of these stories are native Texans: most arrive in the state either from Europe or from cities in the American North, and they explicitly contrast their circumstances in Texas with the culturally richer Jewish communities they left behind. "In Russia," one of Jan Siegel Hart's characters observes to her children, "their lives had centered around their religion and the *shul*." In their new home in Dublin, Texas, however, they were isolated and alone. "Since there were no other Jewish families in Dublin," she adds, "much less a *shul*, they could not enjoy the friendships and feeling of belonging which develop when people are members of a group."[17] Similarly, eleven-year-old Katie Roberts, the protagonist of a young-adult novel by Amy Hest who moves from New York to West Texas after her father's death in World War II and her mother's subsequent remarriage, expresses great regret about the change. "I miss my old bed in my old room in New York City," she confides to her diary. "I HATE living on a ranch in the middle of nowhere! . . . There are no neighbors

[17] Jan Siegel Hart, *The Many Adventures of Minnie*, illustrations by J. Kay Wilson (Austin: Eakin Press, 1992): 63.

nearby. No subways. Not a single tall building. I LIKE CITIES NOT WILDERNESS, AND I AM NO PIONEER!"[18]

Many of these authors, including David Carb, Barbara Barrie, David Applefield, Dede Fox Ducharme, Jan Siegel Hart and Mark Harelik, are native Texans and/or base their stories on their own lives or families. In other cases, as with Ducharme and Lois Ruby, who lived in Texas for several years, authors have supplemented their own experience with historical research to improve their depiction of historical settings: Hart and Ducharme, for example, provide research bibliographies, while Ruby clarifies the historical basis of her story in an appendix. Despite these gestures at historical authenticity, however, writers of fiction are notoriously unreliable as historians: even when they depict historical events accurately it is often impossible to distinguish the real from the imaginary. "Other than . . . a few well-known historical figures peppering the landscape of this book," Ruby states directly, "all the other characters leap from my imagination."[19] While most of these books can be classified as works by Texas Jews, therefore, they cannot reasonably be read as historical documents of the times and places where they are set. As documents of contemporary ideas, however, and as sources of insight into the ways that contemporary Texas Jews remember and describe their collective past, these works are invaluable. They vary greatly in terms of literary quality, and many are written for young readers which, in some measure, diminishes their profundity. Nevertheless, they provide

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[18] Amy Hest, *The Private Notebook of Katie Roberts, Age 11*, illustrations by Sonja Lamut (Cambridge, Mass.: Candlewick Press, 1995): 8.
[19] Lois Ruby, *Swindletop* (Austin: Eakin Press, 2000): 122.

useful perspective on the nature of the Texas-Jewish imagination and unique insight into how the frontier along which Texas Jews have shaped their lives, once an inescapable material reality, has receded into memory and imagination. It is impossible to describe all of these works in detail, but a sampling from them will reveal that Texas Jews still imagine themselves to inhabit a frontier, that Texas is still perceived as a marginal and difficult place for Judaism to exist.

Every one of these authors selects settings and characters that emphasize Texas as a frontier and Texas Jews as a marginal people. Each deliberately avoids a contemporary urban setting, despite the fact that 97% of today's Texas Jews live in large cities (See Table 12) and concentrates instead on rural areas in a remote past when frontier conditions were more typical. In this these authors follow the example of Isadore, the young protagonist of David Carb's 1931 novel *Sunrise in the West*, who, in the latter nineteenth century, wished to find "the wildest part of the mythical, uncivilized, Western Empire" and so bought a railroad ticket to "a village called Dallas," the last stop on the line.[20] Isadore was disappointed with what he found in Dallas: "There's no cowboys here," he wrote to his mother in New Orleans, "and everybody rides slow like at home and don't make no noise. . . . The books and the fellers I heard talking before I left didn't tell the truth."[21] Intent on locating the real frontier, Isadore headed west to Fort Worth, where he found everything he was looking for:

> I'm here now and I'm gonna stay right here. I sure like Fort Worth. It's got cowboys and everything. It's just like the books and people said. I wish you could see it. . . . There's only a few houses, and then a great big

[20] David Carb, *Sunrise in the West* (New York: Brewer, Warren and Putnam, 1931):335-36.
[21] Carb, 340.

> thick forest, and on the other side of that just plains that are all white dust. There's buffaloes and bears and Indians and cowboys out there, they say. Don't get scared. The Indians don't come no more except one or two at a time. They might of course – sometimes I wish they would; it 'ud be mighty exciting. But they won't, Mamma. Oh, you oughter see the cowboys loping up Main Street! I watch 'em all the time.[22]

Like Isadore, the authors of fictional works about Texas Jewry go out of their way to find the frontier they expect Texas to provide. Several works, for example – including Mark Harelik's two plays, *The Immigrant* (1989) and *The Legacy* (1997); Jan Siegel Hart's three stories for children, *Hanna, the Immigrant* (1991), *The Many Adventures of Minnie* (1992), and *More Adventures of Minnie* (1994); and Amy Hest's *The Private Notebook of Katie Roberts, Age 11* (1995) – are set in small towns where the protagonists and their families are the only Jews. In other cases – such as Carb's *Sunrise in the West* (1931), set partly in Fort Worth; Barbara Barrie's *Lone Star* (1990), set in Corpus Christi; Dede Fox Ducharme's *The Treasure in the Tiny Blue Tin* (1998), set in Houston; and Lois Ruby's *Swindletop* (2000), set in Galveston and Beaumont – the stories take place in larger cities but the authors set them in earlier time periods when Texas Jewry was less developed and still largely isolated. In the most extreme case, Jake Saunders and Howard Waldrop set *The Texas-Israeli War: 1999* (1974) in a postapocalyptic future Texas which war and famine have returned to a frontier condition. The only works which occur in contemporary settings – Sharon Kahn's series of crime novels featuring Ruby Rothman, which began with *Fax Me a Bagel* (1998); Kinky Friedman's set of detective stories starring a detective named Kinky Friedman, beginning with *Greenwich Killing Time* (1986); and

[22] Carb, 342.

David Applefield's novel *Once Removed* (1996) – still make some effort to separate their protagonists from the contemporary Texas Jewish experience. Ruby Rothman lives in the small and insular fictional town of Eternal, while most of Friedman's stories take place in New York or on the hero's Hill Country ranch. Applefield's protagonist is a New Jersey native who is in Texas only long enough to pass away in a Houston hospital: one theme of the book, in fact, seems to be that Texas is a better place for a Jew to die than to live, perhaps making Texas the ultimate borderland.[23]

Lois Ruby's *Swindletop*, the most recently published of these works, is also set the furthest in the past. Though Ruby offers her young-adult readers a bizarre and uneven story, *Swindletop* is an excellent example of how authors emphasize the marginal quality of Texas Jewish life: Ruby's characters struggle to find their place in an environment where Judaism is as much an oddity as the other wonders of the Texas frontier. The book is set in Galveston in 1901, following the hurricane that nearly destroyed the city. This is also the period of the Spindletop oil strike near Beaumont, and Ruby's characters are deeply affected by both events. Ruby depicts turn-of-the-century Texas as a strange, even freakish place where bizarre and unnatural events regularly occur. Her

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[23] David Applefield, *Once Removed: A Novel* (Oakville, Ont.: Mosaic Press, 1996); Barbara Barrie, *Lone Star* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1990); Dede Fox Ducharme, *The Treasure in the Tiny Blue Tin* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1998); Kinky Friedman, *Greenwich Killing Time* (New York: Beech Tree Books: 1986); Mark Harelik, *The Immigrant* (New York: Broadway Play Publishing, 1989); Mark Harelik, *The Legacy* (New York: Broadway Play Publishing, 1997); Jan Siegel Hart, *Hanna, the Immigrant*, illustrations by Charles Shaw (Austin: Eakin Press, 1991); Jan Siegel Hart, *More Adventures of Minnie*, illustrations by Diego Vela (Temple, Tex.: Hart Publishing, 1994); Sharon Kahn, *Fax Me a Bagel* (New York: Scribner, 1998); Jake Saunders and Howard Waldrop, *The Texas-Israeli War: 1999* (New York: Del Rey, 1974).

Jewish characters live in a highly insulated community, wandering outside of it only to make contact with equally marginal non-Jewish characters: Ruby, in fact, does not provide a single "typical" gentile character or any sense of what mainstream Galveston life was like. The story's secondary setting, the Spindletop oilfield near Beaumont, is a true frontier, an unsettled region on the verge of development where a diverse collection of rough and uncultured characters interact with little regard for conventional social status or distinctions. In this climate, Jewish characters largely neglect their religious tradition and try to find their way in the emerging Texas society. Only after a great deal of personal adjustment, after flirting with the very edges of mainstream existence, and after some of the state's stranger qualities are resolved, do the protagonists decide that Texas can be "home."

The story of *Swindletop* begins as Kitty and Jake Rubenstein, teenage siblings, arrive in Galveston by train from New York with their father, infant brother, and a twenty-year-old family friend named Reuven Shmuelovitz. They have been staying in New York for about a year, after their mother died on the voyage from Europe. Mr. Rubenstein has decided to take Jake, who was in trouble with the police, to Galveston, which he hopes will offer fewer criminal temptations than New York: Leybe, a friend who traveled with them from Europe, has settled there and has offered to help the Rubensteins adjust to a new life in Texas. Upon arriving at the Galveston depot, the Rubensteins immediately note the strangeness of their new surroundings. "How can New York and Galveston exist in the same country?" Reuven wonders, while Jake worries that "Texas

didn't look a thing like the New York he'd gotten used to. Even the light was different. Sunlight seemed to burn circles into the earth around the platform, and the air looked a hazy pinkish-yellow."[24] The day of their arrival presents a series of events that confirm their impression of Texas as a place somehow outside reality. Descending from the train, the family meets a crowd of people waving flags and a brass band playing "Stars and Stripes Forever": thinking at first that it is a welcome to Galveston, they learn later that the crowd was there to greet President William McKinley, who arrived on the same train. Leybe has sent her black servant, Lank Beamus, to meet them at the station to carry their luggage back to her house, and Lank brings his thirteen-year-old son, Jericho, whose near-death experience on the beach when the hurricane struck has transformed him into a "boy preacher."[25] Jake finds Jericho's rough appearance and mysterious demeanor captivating.

The city itself is in the process of cleaning up and rebuilding after the hurricane, and the storm has left behind it a sense of wildness, of barely controlled disorder. "You should have seen it when I got here in September," Leybe says of her arrival in the storm's immediate aftermath. "There were still bodies stacked like sacks of flour, like cords of firewood."[26] Leybe's use of such domestic imagery, flour and firewood, suggests that the storm inverted normal life, transformed common household items into images of death. Strangest of all, on the same day that the Rubensteins arrive in town, a local Jewish woman gives

[24] Ruby, 4, 5.
[25] Ruby, 2.
[26] Ruby, 20.

birth to a pair of Siamese twins, "two baby girls with their noses pressed to each other," connected at the chest by "a piece of skin as thin as chicken flesh."[27] Their mother refuses to name them – "We hoped they would die," she tells the rabbi's wife – and Lank Beamus expresses the view that it "[d]on't seem right . . . them two stuck together thataway" and that the midwife "[s]houlda put a pillow over their heads when they come out. . . . She oughtn't to have let 'em draw breath."[28] The author again converts common imagery of domestic happiness, newborn infants, into something the characters perceive as monstrous. Kitty is apprehensive about the bizarre world she has entered: "Here in Galveston," she observes, "everything was backwards or upside down, as if Texas were at the opposite end of the earth from their little hometown in Lithuania."[29] Her younger brother, on the other hand, is attracted to the sheer weirdness of it all: Jake "was sure there was nothing like this in New York. What a three-ring circus Texas was!"[30]

The small group of oddball characters with whom the Rubensteins come into contact reinforces their impression of Texas as a frontier society of marginal people. Henry and Mollie Cohen, the rabbi and his wife, are of course based on real people, but Ruby presents them in their strangest possible aspect. When Kitty goes to work in the Temple's nursery, Mrs. Cohen is her supervisor, a woman who "ruled the room she occupied, and she occupied most of any room." The *rebbitzen* "was a tall, fearsome woman who hung over the chair when she sat

[27] Ruby, 14.
[28] Ruby, 34, 39-40.
[29] Ruby, 38, 17.
[30] Ruby, 15.

down and towered over Kitty when she stood up."[31] The rabbi is depicted as even more exotic. He "had been born in London and had served in Africa," and it was rumored that "among his many languages, he could speak one of the African click tongues, but no one had heard him do this [for years]." Cohen is described as a small man whose "bald head came to his wife's shoulder" and who always "wore a black wool suit and stark white shirts with heavily starched collars and cuffs," which "were the *rebbitzen's* constant complaint, because Rabbi Cohen wrote notes on them – who needed food, who was ailing, who couldn't pay for his life insurance."[32] Ruby's use of descriptions like these, though based in fact, underscore the eccentricity of the environment in which Kitty finds herself.

The character with whom the Rubenstein children have the closest attachment is the enigmatic young African American, Jericho Beamus. Ruby carefully describes the process by which Jake and Jericho circle warily around each other and finally find common ground on which to establish a friendship. For Jake, Jericho represents a new, unfamiliar and fascinating world. At their first meeting, when Jericho accompanies his father to carry the Rubenstein's luggage from the depot, Jake, fresh from the democratic streets of New York, treats Jericho as he would any other companion, offering to walk with him and to share the burden of pulling the wagon. "Why does one have to lead and one have to follow?" he asks. "Let's walk together, so when I get tired of pulling the wagon, you'll take a turn. Fair?" Jericho responds angrily, tearing the wagon handle away from Jake. "You're new in Texas, that's for sure," he says, then pulls the

[31] Ruby, 32.
[32] Ruby, 34.

wagon the whole way by himself.[33] Thus Jake begins his life in Texas with an attempt to transgress a social boundary of which he is unaware, and it is left to his social subordinate to correct his mistake, a role Jericho will perform several more times. Jake gets another lesson a few days later when Leybe cautions him against associating with Jericho. "Don't talk to him," she warns. "He's poison. . . . He's *meshuga*. He talks crazy-talk, you can't understand a word. He says it's God speaking through him. Crazy-talk."[34] Jericho, then, not only exists on the other side of a heavily fortified racial divide but is also considered crazy and unfit company for someone like Jake. As a newcomer, Jake must learn to negotiate these imagined boundaries, and as a born rebel he will necessarily try to cross them.

In a later scene, Jake and his sister wander into a tent meeting where black worshipers are listening to a fiery young preacher whom the children are surprised to find is Jericho. Jake is fascinated with the performance, thrilled at the sight of his friend "still in his too-short dungarees and bare feet, his rusty hair wild like it had been shot through with electricity." But when Jericho finishes his sermon with the words "[t]his [is] the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God," Kitty becomes indignant. "Oh, Jake, this isn't for us," she cries, covering Jake's ears with her hands. "We're Jewish, we don't listen to such talk," and she drags Jake away by his ear. Jake's curiosity is aroused, however, and he seeks Jericho out a few days later to ask him about Jesus. "The word felt strange on Jake's tongue," Ruby writes. "He'd never uttered it before; wasn't even sure he'd said it right.

[33] Ruby, 9.
[34] Ruby, 20-21.

Was it *geez-is* or *gee-zuzz*?"[35] Jake later crosses town to search for Jericho's house in the black neighborhood, but when Jericho reproaches him for being there Jake feels for the first time the power of the divide between the two boys. "He didn't belong here on this side of town," he realizes. "He didn't belong anywhere."[36] Soon after, Jake entertains fantasies about returning to New York. "He should never have come to Galveston," he thinks. "With barely a swallow of spit [in New York], a smart kid like Jake could turn a nickel investment into a dime. He could palm two bits just by delivering hats for the milliners or bolts of cloth to the sweatshops." In Galveston, however, there was nothing to do. "Jake needed the bustle of people hurrying, the action of petty larceny."[37] Unable to connect even with the marginal elements in Galveston society, Jake longs for the center he left behind.

Jake finds an outlet for these feelings when Jericho leads him on an adventure to the Spindletop oilfield near Beaumont, a true frontier where men of all kinds intermingle in an egalitarian climate of desperation and fevered opportunism. The possibility of instant wealth looms everywhere. "Jake could just smell money in the air," Ruby writes. "They saw barbers and restaurant owners make change for thousand-dollar bills without raising an eyebrow, and trains were arriving every week with Beaumont's principal import, silver dollars." Jake was perfectly suited for such an environment. "There were a hundred ways to haul in money at Spindletop," Ruby says, "and not all of them were kosher. . . .

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[35] Ruby, 30.
[36] Ruby, 48.
[37] Ruby, 53.

Because Jake Rubenstein was a natural-born swindler, the place suited him fine. He didn't know when he'd been so happy."[38] At one point during their adventure, Jake accompanies Jericho to a prayer service at a nearby black church, where he again feels the sense of being out of place that he had experienced in Jericho's neighborhood in Galveston. "Somehow it felt wrong to be in a church," he thought. "Jewish boys did not go to church. He patted his head. In fact, this was the first time in his life he'd been going around without a hat. What would Papa think?"[39] The deeper into the frontier Jake ventures and the further he travels across the lines that mark him as different from non-Jews and non-whites, the further he finds himself from a sense of authentic Judaism.

While in Beaumont, Jake makes an abortive attempt to reconnect with his Jewish roots by seeking out a rabbi to help him continue his *bar mitzvah* lessons. A Jewish retailer in town directs him to a *melamed* whom the merchant has hired to teach his own son, Saul. "We don't have a rabbi, you know," he tells Jake. "Rabbi Henry Cohen comes over from Galveston two, three times a year." Jake visits the teacher at the merchant's house the next day and is surprised, after so long, to hear conversation in Yiddish. "Who has been your teacher?" the *melamed* asks him. "Rabbi Cohen in Galveston, sir. A little." "Ah, a Reform rabbi," the scholar replies skeptically. When he asks Jake to read a passage from the Talmud, the boy struggles with the unfamiliar Hebrew. "So, the boy is not a scholar," the tutor sneers. "He'll be a businessman like your father, Saul. What, the Jewish people don't need business?" Jake takes the opportunity to leave, but

[38] Ruby, 68.
[39] Ruby, 72.

Saul urges him to stay. "The boy's not interested," the teacher remarks coldly. "He has a fortune to make."[40] Indeed, Jake's mind is elsewhere, on the opportunities in the oilfield and on his family back in Galveston. His frontier experiences in Texas have taken him far enough away from his religious identity that he is as uncomfortable around traditional Jews as he was in church with Jericho.

Meanwhile, Kitty is struggling with the temptations of frontier life in a different way. Despite Galveston's close-knit Jewish community, it is hard to maintain the familiar traditions of Jewish domestic life. "You can't imagine how complicated it is to make a proper Jewish wedding here in the West," Mollie Cohen remarks, "without a decent caterer or klezmer band."[41] Mrs. Cohen assigns Kitty to take care of the Siamese twins in the temple nursery when their mother all but abandons them there, a task that Kitty first finds repulsive but quickly grows into. She comes to love the infants, whom she describes as "[b]eautiful [and] awful."[42] Like Jake, she develops a friendship with a gentile child, the bookish Mariah, who reads voraciously, idolizes Nellie Bly, and longs to grow up and travel on the suffragist lecture circuit. Mariah's drawl and informal dress lead Kitty to assume that she is a country girl, but when Mariah invites her to her house on Broadway, Kitty discovers that her new friend is the daughter of one of the city's richest men. Neglected by her parents, Mariah has

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[40] Ruby, 96.
[41] Ruby, 32. Mrs. Cohen's point is fitting, but from a strictly historical point of view it seems unlikely that the *actual* Mollie Cohen, who was born in Galveston and probably never heard a *klezmer* band, would have made it.
[42] Ruby, 38.

developed a wildly active imagination and an enthusiasm for literature and ideas, and just as Jericho leads Jake into an unfamiliar world of intersecting cultures, Mariah serves as Kitty's guide into new and unsettling territory.

The ostentation of Mariah's house makes Kitty uncomfortable – "There were enough fresh flowers on the table for a whole funeral," she observes – but Mariah's room is a refuge, a simple, quiet place whose clutter Mariah describes as "creative chaos." Here the girls talk about their dreams for the future. While Kitty worries about the construction of her family's new house, her ailing father, her infant brother, her hope to marry Reuven Shmuelovitz, and the Siamese twins, Mariah talks about women's suffrage and invites Kitty to an upcoming rally at which Nellie Bly and Susan B. Anthony will appear. When Kitty reveals her wish "to marry a wonderful man," Mariah responds, "That's it?" "Well, what else was there for a young woman to wish for?" Kitty wonders. Mariah tells her of her own dream of replacing Anthony on the lecture circuit, "making speeches to hundreds of people from the back of a train" and "making men mad!" Mariah stretches her arms wide and insists that "I'm never getting married. I'm going to have romantic encounters with French Foreign Legion officers and Hungarian counts and Italianos." Her description of a life beyond traditional domesticity, while fantastic in its details, moves Kitty deeply enough to reconsider her own plans for the future. "It sure sounded better than being on your hands and knees scrubbing dirt out of the corners of your dry-rot house."[43] Kitty has never

[43] Ruby 79-80.

doubted that her place, her center, is at home taking care of a Jewish family, but Mariah offers her another, divergent possibility on the American margins.

An even more untraditional future presents itself to Kitty in the person of Mr. Newhouse, a representative of the Barnum & Bailey Circus who comes to Galveston to recruit the twins into his traveling show. He meets Kitty at the nursery and urges her to join him as the twins' "nursemaid." "I am prepared to offer you the world," he tells her. "New York. Gay Paree. London. All expenses paid."[44] Outraged, Mrs. Cohen throws Newhouse out of the nursery, but Kitty, especially after consulting with Mariah, gives serious thought to running away with some of society's most marginal people. Mariah heads to the library and comes back with books like *The Romance of the Circus* and *Circus Daze* in which the two search for clues about Kitty's future if she accepts the offer. "Says here you'll visit Paris, Venice, and Lucerne and stay in elegant hotels," Mariah reads, but Kitty is unsure. "Circus people are close family," Mariah continues. "You'll have fascinating company all the time. Let's see, bearded women, three-legged monkeys, midgets eye-level with your kneecaps. . . . Kitty, Kitty, what a life you'll have! I am green with envy." Kitty considers that the twins will need someone to take care of them. "[W]hat if no one held the babies? No one talked to them? No one told them they were Jewish, or lovable, or beautiful?" Her family will miss her, certainly, but Kitty feels compelled to leave, and Mariah urges her to do so. "Kitty Rubenstein, I absolutely forbid you to miss out on this opportunity. Never mind marriage; the circus is the life for you."[45]

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[44] Ruby, 85.
[45] Ruby, 93-94.

Kitty never has to make a final decision because the twins, always sickly, die suddenly. Jake, meanwhile, returns from Beaumont to pursue his *bar mitzvah* studies. While away, he has realized that his feelings about Texas have changed, and he is anxious to return home to Galveston. "Home," he thinks. "Not Lithuania, not New York. Galveston – home."[46] He studies relentlessly at the kitchen table, telling Kitty that he will return to "Swindletop" after he finishes. "I'm going to sleep on a mattress stuffed with ten-dollar bills," he tells her, "but first I have to get through my *bar mitzva* so I don't embarrass Papa at the *shul*."[47] Kitty, meanwhile, has learned from her experience with the twins that she has a knack for caring for children, and she decides to pursue a nursing career. Both Rubenstein children toy with the very margins of the lives available to them, and both ultimately choose to return home and pursue a life closer to the traditional center, if only for a while. Texas, as Lois Ruby presents it, is a place of especially peculiar but enchanting new futures, and both children are tempted by what it offers. Their frontier experiences change them dramatically, but both ultimately reveal a wish not to stray too far from their roots, their family, or their Jewish identity.

The Texas setting that Lois Ruby presents is an outlandish place filled with bizarre events and marginal people. In contrast, Barbara Barrie depicts a more mundane vision of Texas and its Jewish community, one fully grounded in the realities of domestic life during World War II. In *Lone Star*, a novel for young adults, Barrie explores in detail the danger that Texas's frontier condition

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[46] Ruby, 105.
[47] Ruby, 119.

poses to Jewish identity, especially to that of children whose wish to fit in with their non-Jewish neighbors may be more intense and desperate than that of adults. *Lone Star* is the story of Jane Miller, a fifth-grade girl whose family moves from Chicago to Corpus Christi during World War II. Jane continually feels out of place and uncomfortable in her new home, not only because she is one of the few Jewish children in Corpus Christi but because her life in Texas is so fundamentally different. In Chicago, the Millers were relatively wealthy and were active in the city's elite social and cultural circles. Jane's parents were happily married, and she and her older brother, Jeff, enjoyed a comfortable life. They lived near relatives, attended synagogue regularly, and shared the company of other Jewish children and families. Corpus Christi, on the other hand, represents everything that Chicago was not. Jane's father has stolen money from his Chicago insurance clients and has gone broke making restitution, forcing the family to move to Texas to rebuild. They are therefore much poorer, living without a car in a small rented house far from town and from the temple. Jane's mother resents her husband's deception and the poverty it has caused, and their marriage is strained; the children listen through the walls to the sound of their parents fighting. Finally, the Millers feel disconnected from religious rituals which, even as Reform Jews, were crucial to their sense of Jewish identity.

In his or her own way, every member of the Miller family expresses a sense of discomfort and dislocation in Texas. For Mrs. Miller, Corpus Christi represents not only a new environment far from her Chicago family but shameful and unfamiliar financial condition; her bitterness toward her husband is the

substance of many of their arguments, and their new city is a fitting illustration of the damage he has done. "Louis," she tells him on one occasion, "you have ruined our lives. I hate it here! I hate it!" When he tries to convince her that Corpus Christi is "a beautiful place," she responds that "It's horrible. . . . It's hot and full of bugs and mildew, this smelly little house."[48] Jane's brother Jeff, who is in his senior year of high school, claims that he would rather join the army and serve in Europe than stay in Texas, and Jane is surprised that he hates it there so much. "But wouldn't you be scared to fight, Jeff?" she asks him. "Of course I'm scared," he replies, "but it will be better than staying around here and studying Texas history and woodworking."[49] Jeff expresses hope for Jane but acknowledges that "I'll never make it here, Janie. I'm a Yankee. That's how they all think of me, and I can't change. I don't want to change."[50] Their father, while optimistic that Corpus Christi "has a great future and our lives will be better," clearly misses the creature comforts of the Chicago Jewish community. When he learns of a San Antonio bakery that sells bagels, he orders a package to be shipped to him by train. "Perhaps one day," he says, "we'll be able to find some lox and decent cream cheese down here. Wouldn't that be something?"[51] Later, visiting from Chicago, his father-in-law presents him with a block of halvah for a Chanukah present. "Down in this godforsaken place you can't buy halvah, can

[48] Barrie, 27.
[49] Barrie, 79.
[50] Barrie 81-82.
[51] Barrie, 27, 89.

you?" Grandpa observes. Mr. Miller thanks him gratefully, proclaiming the gift "the best thing you could have brought."[52]

On the Millers' first trip to temple, their sense of dislocation becomes more profound as they find themselves out of place even among other Jews: Texas Jews, they find, are not what they are used to. Even the synagogue itself is peculiar, a "white stucco building [that] looked like an old Spanish mission" with stained-glass windows and rough wooden beams extending from the roof; before entering the building, the Millers park their borrowed car under a banana tree.[53] Jane notes the Texas accent of the congregant who welcomes them to the Temple, and later as the service begins, Jane thinks "it was funny to hear Hebrew read with a drawl."[54] Jane listens to the cantor – who, to her amazement, is also their plumber – and recognizes the prayers he sings, "but the melodies were not the same as those in Chicago." Unable to sing along, she worries that God will be disappointed in her. "Did God think that she didn't have 'meditations of the heart' just because she has learned a different melody in another place?" she wonders. "Was he looking down now at her and wondering why she wasn't singing?"[55] The most striking thing about this visit, though, is the presence on one side of the pulpit of "three flags in brass holders: the American flag, the red, white, and blue Texas flag, and a white silk flag with the Star of David rippling in the center." Mrs. Miller is shocked: "Lou, why do they have the Texas flag, for God's sake?" she asks her husband. "State pride runs high everywhere," he

[52] Barrie 127.
[53] Barrie, 39.
[54] Barrie, 39-40, 42.
[55] Barrie, 43-44.

answers. "Kind of nice, don't you think?" "It's ridiculous," she responds. "They can't be serious." Jane has a different interpretation, feeling that "the Jewish flag, in this building like a Mexican fortress, was the odd one." Personalizing the symbolism of the flags, Jane senses that "the Star of David was lonely against its plain white background" while the others, "boldly colored and heavier, were at home."[56]

Like the silk flag among cotton ones that symbolizes for Jane the misplacement of Judaism in Texas, Jane herself feels out of place. The silk dresses her mother makes her wear to school are unsuited for the Texas climate, and Jane envies the light cotton dresses the other girls wear.[57] Jane's school in Chicago was more advanced than her current one, so she frequently knows more than the other students, who resent her for it: "Your schools must be a whole lot better than ours," one friend tells her, "but you kind of keep remindin' us of that all the time."[58] Jane is unfamiliar with Southern manners and customs, forgetting to address her teachers as "ma'am" and "sir": to her parents's horror and her own, she nearly receives a paddling from the principal for acting too "forward" to one of her teachers.[59] Eventually, though, Jane begins to feel more comfortable. She makes a few friends, sits with them at lunch, visits their homes, and learns to ride a horse: soon "the other girls didn't ask so many questions about her life up north." Even though she still feels "slightly left out" since the others "had all grown up together," they accept her into their group, and she changes her clothing

[56] Barrie, 42.
[57] Barrie, 2.
[58] Barrie, 18.
[59] Barrie, 8.

to reflect it: at a Christmas party to which she is invited, she wears the same cotton shorts and polo shirts as the others, wears her hair long like theirs, and joins them in going barefoot.[60]

As Jane explores the many ways of being Texan, however, she inevitably encounters the reality that being Jewish, in itself, sets her apart from other children. Her grandfather, a devout Orthodox Jew who insists during a visit to Corpus Christi on walking the eight miles from his children's house to the *shul* for Sabbath services, makes it clear to Jane that her Jewishness will forever put her at a distance from other Texas children. Grandpa's refusal of a neighbor's invitation to go crabbing in the Gulf – an occupation Grandpa regards as just as *traife* as the shellfish themselves – initiates a conversation that summarizes the deep differences between the generations. "I'm sure fishing or, God forbid, crabbing, might be enjoyable," Grandpa admits. "But that world and mine are different. And you're not part of that world either."[61] Jane responds that she would "like to have a little part of this world," that she would like to make friends in Corpus Christi. "You have other things, Jane," he tells her. "Your people have survived slavery in Egypt and pogroms in Poland. Friends are not as important as living a life of dedication."[62] Jane is outraged, but Grandpa is adamant. "The fact is that your background is not the same as that of most of the people here. You live in a strange place with a strange name. . . . Oy! 'Body of Christ,'" he moans, clutching his head.[63] "It seems to me," he continues, "that you're forgetting what it is to be

[60] Barrie, 62.
[61] Barrie, 48.
[62] Barrie, 49.
[63] Barrie, 49-50.

a Jew. It is the best thing in the world. . . . God chose the Jews and we're a people steeped in beauty and tradition and law." Jane argues that her Christian friends also love their God, and they have holidays and customs which are also beautiful. "I'm sure they do," Grandpa responds flatly, "but it's not good for you to associate with them."[64] Jane grows angrier. "Grandpa," she erupts, "I have to LIVE here!" But for Grandpa any such life is inherently dangerous. "Christians are dedicated to converting Jews to their religion," he warns her, "and you have to be wary. You can be polite to [your friends] but you must maintain your independence."[65] Jane's desire to cross the imaginary frontier that divides her from gentile children is contrary to Grandpa's notion of the Jews as a separate, distinct people. Jane has no explicit wish to abandon Jewish tradition, but Grandpa sees more clearly than she does the possible consequences of acculturation.

Grandpa represents the traditional view that where Judaism is not practiced in its entirety it ceases to exist, that any compromise is utter compromise. Jane, unaware of the complexities Grandpa tries to avoid through such rigidity, persists in her effort to become more Texan, expecting that she can do so without sacrificing her Jewish identity. She looks for ways to reconcile Texas culture with Jewish law, to find a path of balance and accommodation. "Do you think that Jews are allowed to drink Dr. Pepper?" she asks her brother. "Some Orthodox Jews wouldn't," he answers, "unless it was blessed by a rabbi." Jane wonders, then, if "there might be one of those rabbis in Texas. . . who bless

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[64] Barrie, 50.
[65] Barrie, 51.

food?" She also asks her brother about cowboy boots and if he thinks God would mind if she wore them. "For pete's sake, Jane," he replies, "God doesn't know anything about cowboy boots."[66] As trivial as these exchanges seem, they reveal conflict in Jane's sense of herself and a wish to harmonize discordant parts of her identity.

The book's major crisis arises over Jane's wish to explore directly the appeal of Christianity. Adopting the religion of the Texas "Other" represents for Jane the clearest way to fit in. It is the antithesis of Judaism, the element of her identity that places her at the greatest remove from other children: she can accommodate small things like clothes and Dr. Pepper relatively easily, but her religion continues to set her apart and to give her a feeling of difference and isolation. As Christmas approaches, Jane notices the nativity displays going up in yards around town and sees them as a sign of social acceptability. "Jane loved to see the baby Jesus in his crib of straw," Barrie writes. "She always wanted to crawl into the créche – it was like a big doll's house – and become a part of the scene."[67] For Jane, the "scene," Christianity, is like a house from which she is outcast, and her loneliness outside of it, especially as she has left the familiar environment of Chicago behind, pains her deeply.

Jane's curiosity about Christianity precipitates a series of events that leads to a rift within her family. When Jane is invited to a Christmas party, her mother first refuses to let her attend. "What would your grandfather say?" she asks her daughter. "A Jewish girl trimming a tree? Of course you can't go." When Jane

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[66] Barrie, 92-93.
[67] Barrie, 88.

and her brother protest, suggesting that Grandpa need not know, Mrs. Miller grows more adamant. "We have a tradition to uphold," she says. "We have our own holiday, and there's never been a member of my family who has ever had anything to do with a Christmas tree. . . . You know perfectly well that Jewish people don't participate in the celebration of Jesus' birth." Mr. Miller, however, breaks in to contradict his wife, arguing that Jane "won't be breaking a tradition by hanging a colored ball on a pine tree." When Mrs. Miller replies that her father will "tear his shirt, as if she were dead . . . if he thinks she has committed sacrilege by honoring Jesus Christ," Mr. Miller overrules her objections. "You have a right to live your own life," he tells his daughter. "You are going to that party!"[68] Jane attends the party, joins the other girls in decorating the tree, and sings Christmas carols, though "when the words 'Christ' or 'Jesus' came up, she put her lips together and lowered her head so that no one could see her."[69]

A similar argument arises when Jane, delighted with the Christmas party, asks her parents if she can have a Christmas tree of her own. This time even Mr. Miller disapproves. "We're Jewish," he tells her flatly. "We don't have Christmas trees."[70] Jane argues that it could be "a kind of Jewish tree" that she would decorate in blue and white, but her father insists that it is a Christian symbol and inappropriate for a Jewish home.[71] "But no one would care," Jane continues. "And then we would be like everyone else." Her father explains for her the meaning and importance of Chanukah, the celebration of the Maccabaean

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[68] Barrie, 57-60.
[69] Barrie, 64.
[70] Barrie, 71.
[71] Barrie, 72.

revolt and the recovery of the Jerusalem Temple. It was, Mr. Miller explains, "the first time ever that people took up arms and fought for their religion." But Jane is unimpressed. "Doesn't that mean a lot to you?" her father asks. "Not as much as a Christmas tree," she replies.[72]

Jane's persistence, though, has the desired effect, and her father, still feeling guilty for the family's disgrace and dislocation, begins to give in. Later that evening he takes Jane's side in an argument with his wife, who again defends Jewish tradition and threatens her father's anger. "I'm just saying that for once we should consider ourselves and not be so damned afraid of your father," Mr. Miller responds.[73] "Jane is going to have this tree," he declares. "Let her have something! Let her belong somewhere!" As their fighting rises to a crescendo, Mrs. Miller breaks down and agrees to let Jane have a tree. "I do think it's wrong," she says, "but one of us should belong somewhere. . . . I'll find a way to keep it from Papa."[74]

Jane gets her "Chanukah bush," a small fir tree in a stand which she decorates, keeps in a closet, and brings out from time to time to admire. The entire family conspires to hide it from her grandfather when he comes for a holiday visit, but Jane is discovered when Grandpa accidentally stumbles into her room and sees her tree. He runs screaming from the room as family members rush after him to try to calm him. Babbling in "strange words – half Yiddish and half Polish," he runs back into Jane's room "like a wounded, flapping stork, his

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[72] Barrie, 73.
[73] Barrie, 74.
[74] Barrie 75.

black coat opening and spreading apart like wings."[75] He grabs the tree from its stand, swings it over his head, and crushes it into the floor. When Jane tries to talk to him, he picks her up and shakes her violently while shouting at her, "You are an infidel! An infidel! God will punish you for this!"[76] On the verge of flinging the girl across the room, Grandpa collects himself, puts her down, and storms from the house in tears.

Jane hopes that later, when tempers have calmed, she may be able to make her grandfather understand her point of view, "that the tree had made her feel, for a little while, that she was like all her friends in this new town." Jane fears that her broken relationship with her grandfather will deprive her of another kind of connectedness, that it "might cut her off forever from all her relatives in Chicago," leaving her "a person without a past."[77] Wanting to belong to both the past and the future, to her Jewish family in Chicago and to her Christian friends in Texas, Jane has found the two impossible to reconcile. "Judas Maccabaeus is no match for Santa Claus," her father concludes, attempting to explain the situation to Grandpa. "Put them up against each other, and Judas Maccabaeus will lose every time."[78] Grandpa, outraged, cannot disagree, but he concludes that the tree has shamed him and that he cannot forgive his family.

A kind of truce is established between Jane and her grandfather only when word reaches them by radio of the Nazi concentration camps in Europe, a horror so great that even Grandpa cannot explain how God could have permitted it to

[75] Barrie, 152.
[76] Barrie, 153.
[77] Barrie, 156.
[78] Barrie, 159.

happen. Through their shared sense of grief and loss, the family is brought back together, and Jane promises her grandfather that she will never have another Christmas tree and will "try to be a better Jew." "[I]t isn't easy," her grandfather confides to her. "Especially in this place. All these churches . . . churches on every corner. . . . And particularly in a town called Corpus Christi it is not easy to be a Jew."[79] Jane, of course, has already learned this lesson but will have to continue finding ways to be both at once. Caught by her wish to belong in two competing and essentially different worlds, she is resident on the frontier between Judaism and Christianity, between Self and Other.

Jane's desire to observe Christian traditions in order to be accepted in gentile society threatens the authenticity of her Judaism, which is why her grandfather reacts so strongly. The preservation of Jewish belief and ritual, difficult under the best of circumstances, is especially challenging under frontier conditions, far from centers of Jewish activity and surrounded by Christians. Mark Harelik's play, *The Legacy*, is another exploration of the problems of maintaining Jewish tradition in such a frontier. Harelik directly addresses the question of authenticity, of whether the forms of Judaism necessary in a remote environment can provide anything meaningful to their adherents. Here the Estanitsky family lives in an isolated house in the West Texas desert in 1962, well after Jewish communities in Texas cities had advanced to a very sophisticated level. Harelik has deliberately chosen to set his story in the remotest possible corner of the state, an environment one character describes as "the wilds of

[79] Barrie, 170.

Texas" and a "wasteland."[80] Moreover, Harelik explains in the stage directions that the set design for the Estanitsky home should be "the merest frame only" so that the audience "can see through it, around it, beyond it, into the surrounding small town and desert."[81] This transparency keeps the desert setting constantly in the audience's view.

When the play opens, twelve-year-old Nathan is studying for his *bar mitzvah* by listening to phonograph records of his grandfather, Hillel, reciting Hebrew prayers. We learn later that Hillel, who died long before, made the records on a home recording machine so that his grandson would have the benefit of them years later: as the first Estanitsky to venture into the wilderness, Hillel was intimately aware of the hardships his descendants would face, and he planned ahead to make his "legacy," his Judaism, available to them in a form that he hoped would last forever. His son, Nathan's father David, is equally committed to passing the family's legacy on to Nathan, even though the boy finds little to admire in the unintelligible syllables of his Torah portion. In Nathan's first speech, directed to the audience, he compares himself to Moses, not as a Jew fighting to preserve his faith in the wilderness, but as a person incapable of understanding God's language. "'Excuse me, God, what?'" he imagines Moses saying. "'I'm . . . I'm sorry . . . what? . . . Is that – what is that, Hebrew? I'm sorry, I only speak Egyptian."[82] But God, Nathan imagines, was as undeterred as Hillel. "[He] rattled on in His holy language about all sorts of important stuff,

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[80] Harelik, *The Legacy*, 6, 7.
[81] Harelik, *The Legacy*, vi.
[82] Harelik, *The Legacy*, 2. Ellipses in the original.

life-and-death stuff, and Moses just sat there like a grade A, number one goof, not understanding a single word." Like Moses, Nathan is "stuck in the wrong language," unable to understand God's meaning, and he proceeds to do as he imagined Moses did: "He memorizes that voice syllable by syllable and mumbledy by bumbledy and just hopes somebody'll figure it out later."[83] That Nathan identifies himself with Moses indicates some connection to Jewish tradition, but if Jewish identity is inscribed in the "authentic" language of Jews rather than in the vernaculars of the Diaspora, Nathan is already lost, "stuck in the wrong language" and oblivious to the "life-and-death stuff" invoked in syllables he cannot understand.

The Legacy progresses through similar moments in which the Estanitskys, brimming with good intentions but uneducated in Jewish history, language and religion, unwittingly reveal their inability to understand their own religious identity. In one scene, David and Nathan listen to a record on which Hillel relates his life story, slipping momentarily into Yiddish to tell a joke. When he comes to the punchline, David begins laughing. "What happened?" Nathan asks. "He told a joke," his father replies. "What about?" Nathan asks. "I don't know," says his father. "It was in Yiddish." When his son asks him why, then, he is laughing, David has no response.[84] David, especially, seems conscious of what has been lost – he tells a visiting rabbi that when his parents died, "the center fell away" – but he hopes that Nathan will be able to recover what he himself has helped to lose. Even though he had no *bar mitzvah* himself, David insists that Nathan will

[83] Ibid.
[84] Harelik, *The Legacy*, 16.

not miss out as he had. "[P]robably thanks to me," he tells the rabbi, "we're all feeling a little stranded out here, and I want Nathan to have this."[85] David treasures his parents' Sabbath candlesticks, though the family no longer uses them, as well as old family photographs and his father's Hebrew and Yiddish recordings. These are the content of the "legacy" he hopes his son will inherit.

Rabbi Bindler, visiting the Estanitsky home to help prepare Nathan for his *bar mitzvah*, tries to encourage David to reconsider the meaning of the difficult process through which he is forcing his clearly unwilling, unmoved and uncooperative son. An argument begins when Nathan explains to the rabbi that part of the reason he is learning so slowly is that the Hebrew transliteration the rabbi has provided sounds different from his grandfather's recording. "Well, what you're hearing," Bindler explains peevishly, "is the Hebrew your grandfather spoke, not modern Hebrew," which the rabbi provided in the transliteration. "Well, we think it's important that he learn it the way Pop did it," David explains. "But your father spoke with a Russian-Yiddish accent," the rabbi continues. "Surely Nathan doesn't have to." David argues that his father "was from the old country, from a Jewish world, and I think it's important to preserve that, if we can." The rabbi is incredulous: "Preserve an accent?"[86] For the rabbi, the importance of the words lies in their meaning, in the substance of Jewish teaching; for David, on the other hand, it is the form of the words themselves, emptied of their meaning, that the next generation should receive. "Listen, Dave," the rabbi suggests, " it seems to me that what's nostalgia for you is turning

[85] Harelik, *The Legacy*, 33.
[86] Harelik, *The Legacy*, 31.

into a burden for [Nathan]."[87] But David is immovable. "I want him to have a sense of being a Jew," he insists. Bindler dismisses this notion. "[Y]ou're talking about a 'sense' of being a Jew," he says, "like a 'flavor' or a 'feeling.' How can I help you with that? Your photo albums, your recordings, your candlesticks – they do that."[88] But if David wants his son to have "something solid," the rabbi asserts, David must understand that

> Jewishness is not a few fond memories of your father. A *bar mitzvah* isn't a merit badge, like in the Boy Scouts. It's an entry into a way of life. That's where "Jewishness" is. But if you want to live that life, either one of you – Nathan, are you listening? – you have to be ready to serve a mission – a ministry, as our loyal opposition would say. To fulfill as many of the 613 mitzvot as we can. ["613 what?" David asks.] Commandments in the Torah. Then you will be serving God. Not yourself. You understand? . . . A "sense" of Jewishness comes from living a Jewish life. It's pretty simple.[89]

It is not, however, so simple for David: "We are Jews," he insists angrily. "630 commandments – for chrissake! . . . You talk about Jewishness as though we lived in some beehive of Jewish life. We don't have a community, we have our family, our family's history." For David, the point is not to learn Hebrew, which, he asserts, "nobody understands anyway," but to preserve family traditions, "the voice" of his father, the only history the Estanitskys have.[90] Both men understand the importance of preserving something – "I think you know," Bindler says, "if this passes him by, it's gone" – but they disagree deeply about what exactly they should be preserving.[91] For David, religious identity itself is not at stake because

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[87] Harelik, *The Legacy*, 32.
[88] Harelik, *The Legacy*, 33.
[89] Harelik, *The Legacy*, 34.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Harelik, *The Legacy*, 35.

he and his son were born Jews, an inherited status they carry with them even into the wilderness. In their remote location, however, where there is no Jewish community to support them, David imagines that "Jewish life" is therefore impossible except insofar as it is the same as family history. For the rabbi, on the other hand, any family's particular history is only a fragment of the whole of Jewish existence; an genuine Jewish life has a fixed center of personal belief and self-identification. By limiting his definition of "Jewishness" to "the way Pop did it," David risks nothing less than the authentic expression of Judaism itself.

In the remainder of the play, Harelik further reveals the flaws in David's way of thinking and pushes the story to a powerful conclusion. David's wife, Rachel, is suffering from cancer and facing impending death, and she turns to Rabbi Bindler to explain why she suffers. She wants Judaism, which her family has all but abandoned, to provide answers in her time of greatest need. She is not interested in "consolation," she tells the rabbi, only to understand "why this is happening." Bindler responds bluntly and without sentimentality: "You've asked why this is happening to you. . . . [W]hy shouldn't it happen to you?" Rachel is astonished, but the rabbi continues. "[W]hy do you think you should be special in the eyes of God? Millions of people have died unjustly since the world began. Babies have died, children. Why you? Why not you?"[92] No one, the rabbi continues, deserves to die, yet everyone does, and God's reasons are unknowable: "It doesn't make sense to me, either," he tells her. Rachel is unimpressed and resentful. "[B]efore this happened, we didn't have a question in the world," she

[92] Harelik, *The Legacy*, 40.

tells the rabbi, "we didn't need you. And here we are now, swimming in questions, and you shrug your shoulders."[93] Misunderstanding the rabbi's argument that willful obedience to God's purpose makes pain and death less ominous, Rachel feels no comfort. Tough-minded and realistic, Bindler's Judaism has failed to provide the solace that she believes religion should offer. In its place, her husband again insists that family, David himself and not God, should be the main source of Rachel's strength as she weakens, and in a symbolically charged moment David grows angry and throws the rabbi out of the house. "I want you to keep in very close touch with me," the rabbi tells David as he leaves. "You and Rachel need to be part of a community. You're too far away from people." But David still does not understand. "We've got neighbors," he says, to which the rabbi replies: "Our people, Dave."[94] The Estanitskys have drifted so far from the center of their faith, from Jewish religion and community, that these institutions can provide them nothing when they need it most.

In a final and explicit challenge to Jewish continuity, Rachel makes a tentative conversion to Christian Science under the tutelage of her Aunt Sarah, who converted as a child following an illness of her own. Sarah's message of spiritual healing convinces Rachel that she can rid herself of the cancer through faith in Christ. Suddenly filled with joy and hope, Rachel asks David to accompany her to church, which he refuses to do. He explains his reasons to his wife:

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[93] Harelik, *The Legacy*, 42.
[94] Harelik, *The Legacy*, 47.

> You know I've spent my whole life here trying to fit in. But there comes a point, for me and Nathan, when we have to do something to define ourselves and that something is, we don't pray with them. We don't go to church with them. Not because it's bad, but because there's got to be a separation somewhere.[95]

David has compromised every element of Jewish ritual and is utterly without faith, but when pushed to the wall he finally draws a line around his Jewish identity and defends it. With the positive content of his faith reduced to nothing, he defines himself in the negative: he is a Jew because he will not be a Christian.

In his earlier play, *The Immigrant*, Mark Harelik told a story of a family acculturating successfully in a small Texas town, but in *The Legacy* he returns to the subject with a more jaundiced eye. The Estanitskys are, as Nathan explains in his final speech, "kind of lost." When Rachel dies, father and son sit alone, unsure what will happen next. "Our house was floating across the desert and you didn't know which way was ahead and which way was behind," Nathan says in a final narration. "We didn't know where we were going or what was going to happen when we got there."[96] The Texas desert provides the perfect setting for this conclusion, a barren open space in which direction is easily confused: without the guideposts of religious tradition, in which all of the Estanitskys express great doubt, their lives have no direction or clear purpose.

In all of these works, the frontier, both as an exterior reality and as an imagined cultural boundary, provides the central theme. Every protagonist in these stories faces a crisis of dislocation, a sense that he or she lives in a place that is peripheral to Judaism and that provides little support for it. Each interacts with

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[95] Harelik, *The Legacy*, 63-64.
[96] Harelik, *The Legacy*, 86.

non-Jewish Texans in ways that either reinforce their sense of outsiderness or force them to defend themselves as authentic Jews. It is significant that even as Jewish life in the "real" Texas has become more like Jewish life everywhere else, as Jewish institutions in Texas have thrived in all of their richness and complexity, writers of the Texas Jewish experience have found the frontier to be still a compelling and indispensable part of that experience. In both the external reality of social and communal life and in the internalized conflicts that define identity across and along imaginary frontiers, contemporary Texas Jews are still deeply concerned with defining a place for themselves among other Jews, other Americans, and other Texans.

While these writers reveal the hardships and difficulties of that process and while some, like Harelik, seem to conclude that Jewish identity in Texas is, indeed, at risk, the fact that they produce such works suggests the ultimate strength and resiliency of Texas Jewry. It is a community complex and self-aware enough to sustain a small but significant literature of its own in which Texas Jewish writers engage complicated problems of history, memory, identity and spiritual authenticity, all of which are crucial to the Jewish experience everywhere, from a distinctively Texan perspective. In doing so, they demonstrate that the real and imagined frontiers of Texas provide a rich and rewarding context for exploring these important themes.

Conclusion

Early in my research for this dissertation, a history professor advised me to avoid telling a story tainted by "triumphalism." It was too simple, he explained, and too sentimental, to write about heroic men and women of the frontier overcoming obstacles and guiding American civilization from the barbaric past into the glorious present. It was important to recognize that people were people, that their motives were frequently mixed, that progress came (if, in fact, it came at all) with great cost to men and women who did not benefit from it and whose stories often go untold. A complete picture would reveal that history and progress are not at all the same thing, that sometimes we must discern failure even in what seem the clearest victories.

He was right, of course, and I have tried to keep that advice in mind as I have written. As I conclude, however, I cannot help but feel that Jews in Texas have, in fact, triumphed in a way. Not, certainly, in the way my professor cautioned me about: they were not men and women of marble, heroes of an epic tale of prevailing over adversity. If anything, the history of Texas Jews reveals a remarkable *lack* of adversity. They were white in a society utterly dominated by white people. They were financially successful, most within less than a single generation. The majority culture accepted them with barely a whiff of prejudice or discord, generally treating their achievements with admiration rather than with resentment. They were rarely barred from any opportunity to hold, wield, or profit from the use of power. As my professor suggested, for me to tell this story

as one of triumph over hardship would have been absurd, as well as insulting to those people who really have suffered, and who continue to suffer, prejudice and poverty in Texas.

But this is not to say that Texas Jews have not enjoyed a victory of a kind: the very comfort of their lives set the stage for their own triumphant, and by no means assured, survival as Jews. In spite of their white skins and their wealth; in spite of the lack of hostility and discrimination they faced; in spite of the ease with which they could have simply disappeared into the white majority, they did not do so. They remained, in their hearts and in their public performances, a people apart, joined with non-Jewish Texans as citizens of the places where they lived but always pulled away by other loyalties, other aims, other sources of meaning. When non-Jews, when the economically powerful, when even the Ku Klux Klan failed to distinguish them, they distinguished themselves. Boundaries between them and others that were all but invisible to everyone else were crucial to them, and rather than obscuring those lines they deepened and highlighted them. Of course they used their racial advantages – what saints do not? – but at the same time they took risks, continually defining and redefining who they were. In a place where the frontier was an enduring reality of life, Texas Jews poised themselves on the high wire between realities and between identities, daring to be, as much as possible, everything at once.

This dissertation seeks to achieve two primary objectives. On the one hand, I have tried to produce a narrative history of Texas Jewry that is as thorough, factual, and engaging as possible. The Jewish community of Texas is a

subject about which both professional and amateur scholars have written extensively, and I am indebted to countless researchers who have done the real grunt work of historical investigation: copying the worn names and dates off tombstones, poring line-by-line through census records and congregational membership lists, surveying and indexing newspaper articles, unearthing the most minute details of lives and events remote in time and scantly documented. Until now, however, the wealth of such material that exists in archives, libraries, newspapers and periodicals, and published articles and monographs has not been collected into a single, continuous narrative that attempts to capture the totality of the Jewish experience in Texas. To be sure, comprehensiveness is impossible in so large a field, but I believe that this work succeeds in making as much material as possible available in as useful a form as possible.

Secondly, I wanted to offer an interpretation of the Jewish community in Texas that suggests how it might fit into larger themes in Jewish and American history. The Texas Jewish experience is well-documented but, until now, largely unexplained, leaving a reader with the impression that what the Jewish people have done in Texas is either without meaning or is important only for its own sake. On the contrary, the Jewish experience in Texas illuminates a number of crucial themes in Jewish and American history that should be explicitly noted, and this study seeks to do so. At the same time, I hope that this work makes a contribution to these larger fields by using Texas Jewish history to suggest new ways of thinking about some very old questions.

Since the earliest histories of the Jews, including those collected in the Bible, Jewish experience has been understood as circular: from their origin point in Jerusalem Jews were forced into exile and into migration across the globe, but they will eventually return to Jerusalem to fulfill their true historical destiny. By this interpretation, which is pervasive, everything that occurs to Jews in the interim, while they are rootless, wandering and exiled, is basically unimportant. The Diaspora is a temporary existence involving people who will either return to their "true" history or who will remain lost to Judaism forever: either case renders their diasporic experience irrelevant. Many earlier studies of diasporic communities have reinforced this impression by documenting the declension of Diaspora Jews, the many ways in which acculturation, assimilation, and accommodation destroy their sense of themselves as a distinct ethnic and religious entity and allow them to be absorbed into other cultural groups.

On the other hand, such studies may, like this one, demonstrate how Jewish survival in the Diaspora is not only possible but offers opportunities for Jewish identity to evolve into new, equally meaningful forms. I do not mean to suggest by this that Texas Jewry represents a Jewish experience as deep or as rich as that which has existed in places like Jerusalem, New York, or nineteenth-century Eastern Europe. Certainly the Texas Jewish community is too small and relatively indistinct from its gentile neighbors to make such a comparison, nor has it produced the arts, language, and self-conscious world view that might mark it, as they mark these other places, as mature and self-identified Jewish communities. But this dissertation demonstrates that a beginning point has

perhaps been reached, that Jewish Texans have achieved a critical mass of population and an institutional vitality that may permit the development of a true Texas Jewish culture.

Whether or not this happens, the Jewish community of Texas illustrates that Jewish religion and identity are not fated for destruction in the Diaspora but continue to thrive, often in surprising and unfamiliar ways made possible only because of the diasporic experience. As such, it provides an example of cultural adaptation and survival in a remote place that may serve as a model for future studies of Jews in other isolated places or, I hope, of other ethnic groups separated from their own supposed "centers" or "homelands." As the diaspora idea takes hold among scholars of African, Chinese, English, Irish and other ethnic groups as a way of describing how they have scattered across the face of the Earth, stories like the one I tell here may provide hints about how ethnicity and traditional identification may survive in innovative ways and in unexpected places. And as Jews have made themselves at home in Texas while retaining many of the characteristics that make them distinct from other Texans, other ethnic and religious groups may do the same in other diasporic places.

Finally, as a work of American history, this dissertation engages the continuing redefinition of the idea of the frontier, a term which has been much disparaged in recent years as fundamentally racist and imperialistic. Understood as Frederick Jackson Turner defined it, as a meeting point between civilization and savagery, it deserves to be disparaged. As I use the term in this study, however, I believe it is a useful way to understand the intersection and

confrontation of cultures in a place like Texas. Defined as an imagined space of cultural interaction, where differences collide, groups encounter one another, and cultural boundaries must be devised and continually revised, the frontier remains an evocative and eminently useful idea. As an internal rather than an external reality, it provides a powerful metaphor for the cultural collisions that American pluralism inevitably produces and for the new forms of cultural expression and group identity that emerge from those collisions. In this sense, the frontier is a much larger idea than Turner knew: it explains the very process through which American culture is produced out of its constituent parts and thus remains, as Turner originally imagined it, absolutely essential to understanding the making of American identity.

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Vita

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